

WINTER ISSUE DECEMBER 2021

# WIPER

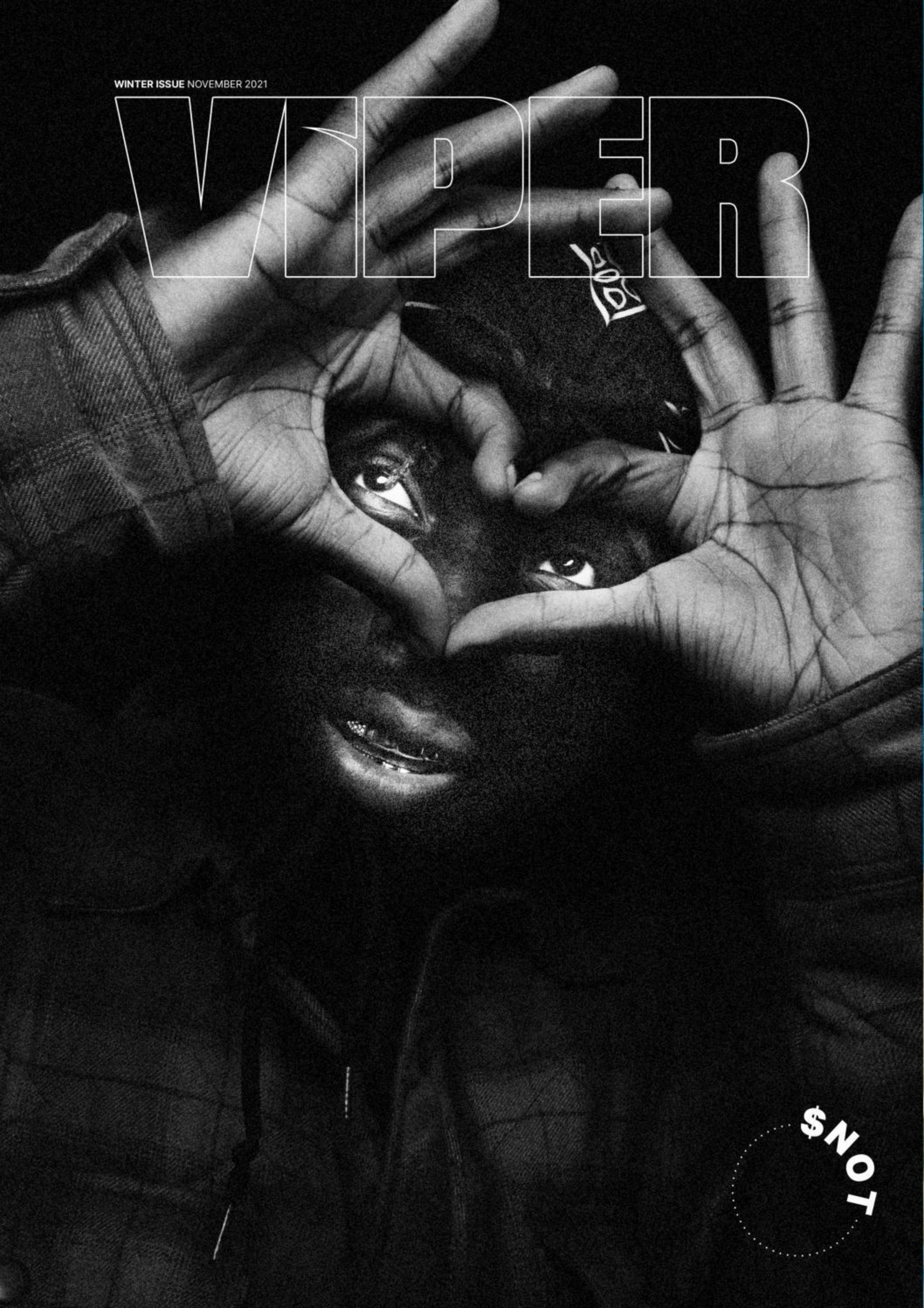
AYRA STARR  
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AYRA  
STARR



WINTER ISSUE NOVEMBER 2021

# WPPER



NOT \$



WINTER ISSUE NOVEMBER 2021

# WINTER

ARRDEE



Baby it's cold outside, so wrap  
up warm and settle down to read  
this...



\$NOT by Mike Miller







# 34 Editor's Letter

Welcome to another exciting issue of VIPER, starring the UK's man of the moment, ArrDee! He began 2021 working in the Amazon warehouse and is ending the year as a cover star. Get to know him with this intimate interview, in which he tells the hilarious story of meeting Tion Wayne and explains the importance of manifestation.

A Jewellers is without doubt the go-to brand for London's elite. Get to know the founder's journey so far, from selling watches to dealers in his teens, to crafting pendants for A-List rappers like Fredo and AJ Tracey. Full of insight on trading, the interview is a must-read for those with interest in getting into the jewellery game.

Paloma Ford's 'X-Tapes' EP was one of our essential listens through the pandemic. With the sequel on the way, we caught up with her to find out about her newest project, a fashion line titled The Westside Collection, with visuals shot by Estevan Oriol.

Fresh from a stunning collaboration with Potter Payper, Suspect let us in on some of the featured artists on his upcoming album. We promise that you're in for a treat when the project drops in early 2022. The South London rapper has been one of the most prominent names in UK Rap for several years but he's set to make a huge impact with his new music.

American actress and musician Diamond White has an impressive list of credits under her belt already. With a new role on the horizon, voicing a Marvel/Disney character. We caught up with her to talk black superheroes and voicing characters for shows that she watched as a child.

As one of the founders for DRB LasGidi, Teezee is an icon in Nigeria's Alté movement. Having founded NATIVE magazine and NATIVE LAND festival, he's pushed his hometown's culture to new heights. Returning his focus to his solo music career, he tells VIPER about his new project 'Arrested By Love'.

It's hard not to adore Tomi Agape, with her striking voice, impeccable fashion sense and humble personality. As one of the best known faces of Alté in the UK, she's collaborated with many of Africa's most exciting names. Get to know her on a deeper level via our interview.

Fresh from the release of Juls' album 'Sounds of my World', we caught up with the London producer to chat about international musical influences. Featuring a whole host of familiar names, the album is essential listening and set to keep you warm through the colder months.





My favourite part of the interview with ShaSimone was finding out we went to the same school - about a decade apart! While her career so far has been brief, she's already blown away music lovers across the UK with her featured verse on Dave's album, 'We're All Alone in This Together'. Get to know all about East London's rising star in our interview.

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I've been playing Kami on the radio since 2014 and have been a huge fan of him and his fellow SAVEMONEY members ever since. I hope to soon hear the Leather Corduroys project that he and Joey Purp are sitting on, but for now I'll have to be content with reading his VIPER interview...

Kadiata is a triple threat, boasting skills as a rapper, producer and singer. Hailing from South London, he's part of London's most exciting music scene and bringing a fresh and honest vibe to UK Rap.

Another rising star from Hackney, Amaria BB talks to VIPER about shooting her new video for 'Fundz' with Skillibeng in Jamaica.

NMB New York is pushing the boundaries when it comes to sustainability in fashion in 2021. With an emphasis on recycling existing pieces of clothing, the collection is highly desirable, with something for everyone.

Lily Mercer





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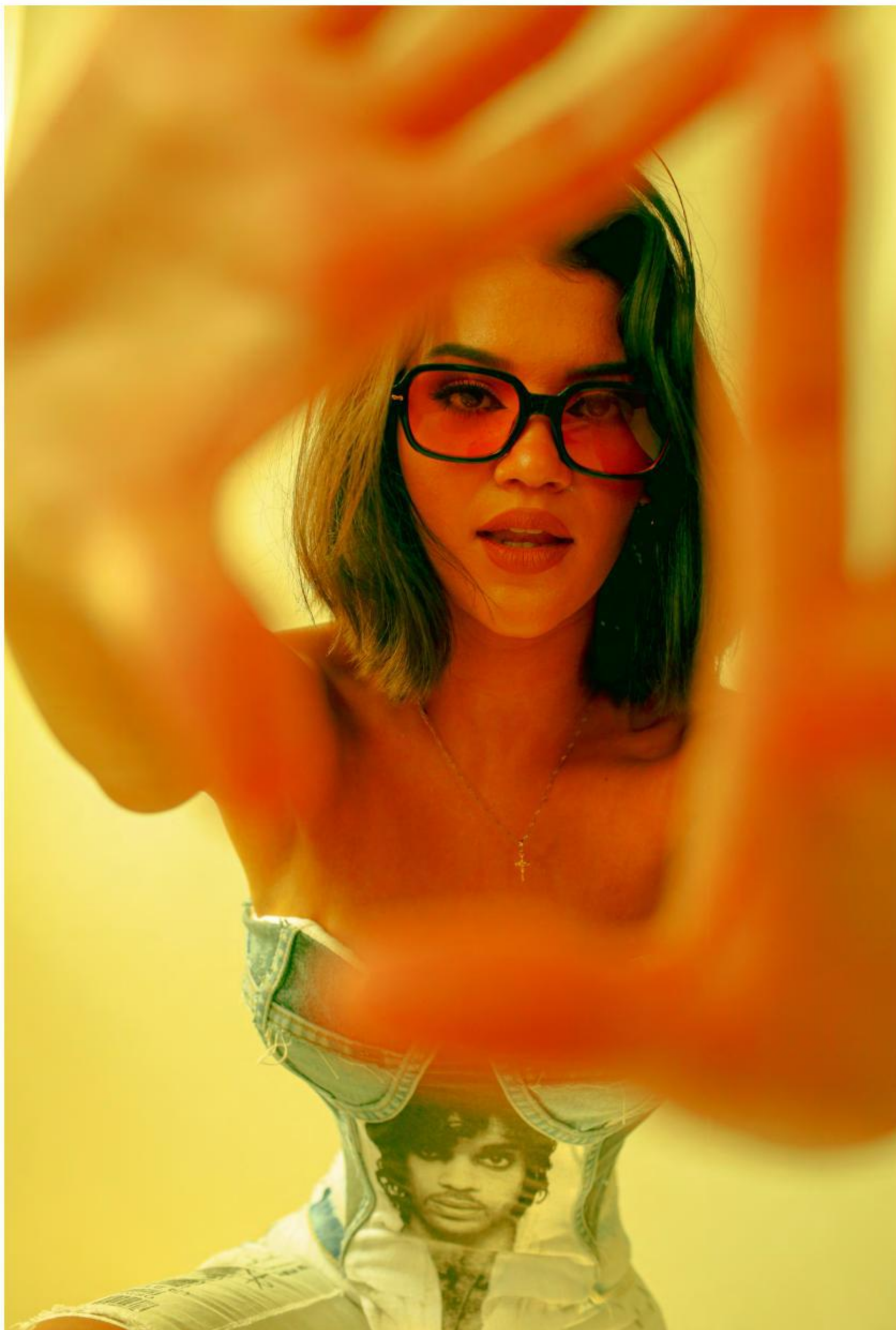






EVISU  
CRATER RIDE  
Osaka Japan

EVISU





**NMB New York had VIPER captivated from the first glimpse. Maybe it was the denim corset embellished with the face of Prince, or the must-have shorts made out of spliced vintage tees. Either way, this brand will have you looking stylish AF, all while doing your bit to save**

Not only is the brand desirable AF, it's also sustainable AF, as pieces are upcycled from old vintage pieces and other reclaimed clothing. These items are deconstructed, with the fabric used to create original NMB classics. In addition to this, the company creates pieces from overstock items they source - that's excess merchandise that doesn't sell in stores - flipping these to give them a new lease of life. One example of this is their NMB baseball caps emblazoned with the words, "unprecedented times" above an embroidered yellow smiley face.

While we all feel like we're doing a good thing when we donate clothing to charity, only 10% of it actually gets sold. This makes the work of NMB so important as they reinvent out of style pieces to bring them back to the forefront of fashion. This is done with an edgy and distinct style, unique to NMB, resulting in the brand's solid identity.

As an added bonus, rocking the brand will ensure you're never wearing the same outfit as someone else at the party, with each piece being one of a kind. Literally - no NMB piece of clothing looks the same, as each is an original, giving every customer their own unique expression. The process sees thrifted, vintage and mass-produced clothing, deconstructed, with the fabric used to create new, upgraded NMB original items.

While born out of thrifted pieces, there is no gloss lost when it comes to the final product, with a luxe look and fresh feel served up every time. This feels like the first time we can truly be sustainable consumers, without compromising on catwalk credibility. Thanks to NMB, as style lovers we're making strides toward a fashionably cleaner world and a healthier environment. Reduced waste never looked so good.

VIPER's fashion team aren't the only fans of the brand, which has been worn by countless musicians and influencers too. NMB was born out of a quest for individuality. Founded in October 2020 by designer Natalie Brown, NMB New York is based on her thesis collection from Parsons School of Design, where she graduated in 2020 with honours in Fashion Design.

Launching her brand immediately after graduating, Brown followed her dream of creating the clothing that she wanted to wear, but could not find. A native of Peachtree City, Georgia, Brown's desire was to create clothing that empowered its wearer, ensuring they "feel good, look good and do good." Not only has she done this, she's allowed fashion lovers to be sustainable and stylish.

The next time you consider buying something like a new T-shirt, remember that it takes over 3000 litres to make one cotton tee, while it takes almost none to upcycle an old one. Plus, NMB will get you far more clout credits, trust us! With the brand's blueprint based on sustainability, we envision a long future of reinventing and updating past-loved pieces. These one-off pieces are in high-demand so you'll have to snap them up fast if you want to add NMB to your wardrobe.

















**Amaria BB is one to watch, rapidly rising up the ranks of the UK music scene. She talks to VIPER about shooting a video in Jamaica for 'Fundz', her collaboration with Skillibeng...**

**When did you know you wanted to feature Skillibeng on 'Fundz'?** I was in America working on some music with Dre Skull when the song came about. I heard the vibe of Skillibeng and knew it would be a great fit as we're both versatile.

**Was it your first time working with Dre Skull too?** Yes this was my first time in the studio with Dre Skull but I have known of his work.

**What was the best part of shooting the video?** The best part of the video was being in Jamaica and the culture, being in the community mixing with the people who live there. Also the electric energy and vibes.

**You tweeted "My Ep is finished" so what can we expect to hear?** Yes my EP is finished! My EP is a vibe, it's a mixture of my R&B vocals and Dancehall elements. This EP is raw!

## **"What do I bring to the scene? Some real shit."**

**Is there a song from the EP that you're most excited to perform?** I like performing in general so I can't wait for them all.

**You were heavily into music and drama from a young age, how does it feel now to see the work you've put in start to pay off?** Seeing my work pay off - as you put it - is a blessing. I work hard cause I want it.

**What do you bring to the scene that no one else is right now?** What do I bring to the scene? Some real shit.

**What was the best part of your year?** The best part of my year was hearing people sing my song when I perform.





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Kadiata



Photographer: **Blakedbds**  
Stylist: **Flowerchild**  
Styling Assistant: **Lily Ndiaye**  
Art Director: **Eddie Cheaba**

Scarf: Daily Paper



**As a rapper, singer and producer, this triple threat boasts beat making credits for Sam Wise, Miraa May and more. But it's his own music that has captivated us, with 2021's 'Lost, This Winter' EP displaying witty wordplay and humorous one-liners. We caught up with South London's Kadiata the day after his headlining show to talk about burnt plantain, collaborating with friends and how 'Toxic Toxic' has affected his love life.**

**How was your show last night?** There were a lot of singalongs. I feel like my songs are very easy to catch on to, they're not mad complicated like that. I love that.

**Did you bring any guests out?** I brought out Jords and we did 'Post Quarantine' from 'Lost, This Winter' and then we did 'Enemies' featuring Masego, which was sick. Then I brought out Sam Wise obviously and we did 'When The Sun Comes Out' - that song always gets a beautiful response. Second night we brought out Miles from Kinshasa, we did our latest single 'Don't Be An Opp' and then we brought out Knucks for us to do 'Guess What'. I didn't want to tell everyone to come on both nights, just so the first night is one experience and the next night is another experience.

**"Everybody loves  
plantain and  
everybody knows  
how sweet it is so  
that's pain."**

**What was the best part of making your project 'Lost, This Winter'?** The best part of making it, I stepped into a different bag with that one. Obviously there's still singalongs on there, that's just what I do, but I feel like I was saying a lot more than I usually do. Usually my songs would be just vibes, vibes, vibes, but on that one there I felt like more songs than not, I was saying stuff. I went through this and this is how I felt or what not, so to be able to say that over vibes is the perfect balance for me.

**Do you have a favourite song on the project?** It changes all the time you know, when I first completed it it was 'Deeper One'. When I first made 'Toxic Toxic' that was my favourite and I based the whole project off that one song. Then I made 'Deeper One', then it was 'Post Quarantine' and then all of them. [Laughs]

**Has 'Toxic Toxic' had any effect on your love**

**life, have you had any girls that are scared to date you now?** I did have one girl that I tried to move to, she kind of liked me and what not. She was like you're cute and I tried to move to her but she was like, "excuse me you just made a song called 'Toxic', I don't want anything to do with you." I just started laughing but in the grand scheme of things people love it because at the end of the day the song is about me being toxic but also about all of us being toxic. So yeah, no one's perfect and I'm saying that we can all be a bit toxic and I feel like that's what the song kind of represents.

**You have some banter situations in your lyrics, how true are these things that you take the inspiration from? Like the plantain lyric on 'Toxic Toxic' for example.** It's very true to life. That day when I made 'Toxic Toxic', the night before I literally did burn plantain [Laughs] and I was just thinking that's pain. Because everybody loves plantain and everybody knows how sweet it is so that's pain. Basically I was having a conversation with a lady friend I was seeing at the time and we were just talking, having a deep conversation and she was like "I feel like you know pain, like I can hear the pain in your voice and in the sentences that you speak." I was like, "rah like that's crazy cause usually I'm a very bubbly person. I can have deep conversations for sure but it was just like all of those events inspired those bars, like it's a deeper situation but it also has the element of banter too.

**The title of 'Lost, This Winter', where did that come from?** 'Lost, This Winter', the whole project was literally during the pandemic and for the majority of the time making the project I was living completely by myself and I just had a lot of time to think and reflect and be lonely one day, be super independent and strong the other day. You know just a range of emotions, so 'Lost, This Winter' was such a good way to name the kind of mood and the stuff that I was going through at the time. Then obviously you've got the project before that, which is 'Blind This Summer' which is like the complete opposite which is, we're going out we're not worried about anything.

**Are you thinking like with future project titles that you're going to do something with Spring and Autumn?** Yeah, 'Sprung This Spring' and then 'Fall This Autumn'.



**When are you dropping the next project** It depends because I've got loads of music there but I don't know if it's necessarily ready for 'Fall This Autumn' right now. So the next one might be 'Sprung This Spring' or if not, I might just drop singles. Then drop 'Sprung This Spring' or 'Fall This Autumn' next year.

**You produce as well as rapping and singing, so what came first for you?** I think rapping just because it's the easiest thing to do. I mean it's not the easy thing to do, but it's the quickest thing that everybody can do. If we talk in a certain way it's just rapping, we don't have to have mad vocal cords or we don't have to learn chords - so I think rapping came about first. I was just like, I like that, I wanna try it. I tried it but I always felt like I wasn't close enough to the music, like the actual music itself. So that's when my brother introduced me to production and I just took it a bit too far didn't I?

like I'm not God, I'm just going home just like the rest of you. So I feel like I can never really get gassed because a part of me doesn't even like it. A part of me is like, "don't look at me like that, look at you like that, you're great as well. You're out, you came out today, you're making the most out of your day, you're living life." I feel like that's something to be celebrated just as well as, "oh, look at me guys, I'm a performer." So maybe it's the people I'm around as well, I feel like the people I'm around are very grounded also.

**So how do you feel about the music industry at this stage compared to like when you first got into it?** I love that the artists that I've been working with are my favourite artists in the whole country. There isn't anyone with more numbers that I think is better than these men that I'm working with, there isn't anybody. But shit is changing, more of us are starting to get in certain places that we couldn't necessarily

**"I tried to move to her but she was like, "excuse me you just made a song called 'Toxic', I don't want anything to do with you."**

**As a producer that makes your own music, how do you decide what you give to other people and what you keep for yourself? Is that a hard choice sometimes?** It is a hard choice yeah, but what usually happens is, if I'm just at home and I'm making something sick and I feel like I could be on it then I'll be on it. Usually the only way other artists get beats is if they do a session, so I'm in a session with them there and then and it's like okay, I have no choice but to give it to you.

**With the artists that you have worked with, have they been friends as well? So you'd have to have a relationship with them beforehand?** Sure, for sure. Obviously management always like, try and work with this person or that person but I'm always mindful. I like to know the people that I'm working with 'cause you know when you've worked with someone and then some bullshit comes out about them after or they just move mad, I hate associating myself with weirdos. So I always love getting to know the artists and being able to go into another room and sing their praises.

**How do you keep yourself grounded in this industry?** I realised that yesterday when I came off stage, everybody was like "oh my god, oh my god, you're best," but a part of me was just

get in before because of certain gatekeepers or whatever. But I feel like we're getting to a certain place where they can't ignore us forever. So for me, I'm just doing my part, hopefully, I get to add value to what we were building.

**There's a structure in independent music now that there never was before, do you feel like the opportunities are much more open to you than before?** Yeah for sure, just like the way we've clocked how to navigate the system. We have been bypassing the gatekeepers and going straight to the fans and the fans have been singing our praises. You get to a certain point where it's like, why were so many people singing these people's songs but you are not playing it or you are not talking about it? You are out of the loop so then you have no choice but to post it but there's been such an agenda as well. Especially in UK Rap, there's been such an agenda; You have to be a fucking gangster rapper, you have to talk about certain things. I just feel like it's an agenda by the gatekeepers who are like "yeah let's keep it like this." But if you look at people in America, people are just being themselves and to be honest for me the greatest artists over there are not the gangster rappers, they're just the people that are being themselves and being creative geniuses. Hopefully, we can take the UK into that direction as well but we'll see.









**You obviously put a lot of thought and creativity into visuals, will we be getting any more from 'Lost This Winter' or are you moving on to new singles?** I want to do more visuals for 'Lost This Winter' but the stuff I've been making lately is kinda mad. I'll try to make more visuals for 'Lost This Winter' but at the same time I'm really excited to drop the new music. So I have to think about it.

**And what are your plans for the next year in terms of dropping music?** I haven't thought that far ahead, I've just been getting the music to a point where it's like, "oh my God, this is amazing, I can't wait to release this." Even yesterday, I performed some of the new songs and it was going crazy so I feel like we've got that to a good place and now we can think about how we are going to market this. How are we going to drop it? You know, the stuff that you have to do that artists ain't really supposed to do.

**How did you get your first steps into the official career lane outside of being like a kid making music?** It just happened organically, I made a song called 'Goodnight'. Shout out to Ryan Bassil from Noisey, he must have heard it because he was managing a good friend of mine Miles. He heard it and said this is different, it's hard, I'm gonna put it out." So when I did the music video, I sent it to him and he was like "Rah and you directed this yourself?" Before you knew it people were like, "who's this guy doing everything himself?" Then I dropped a few other songs here with songs and it kind of got

a few blog attention and you know, back then blog attention was more important than ever. This is like 2015,16 but then the more music I kept putting out, the more it kept spreading organically. I remember I put out a song called 'Art Hoes' at the end of 2017 and it was getting a good response but then the way the numbers kept going up, I was like, "what's going on here?" So it wasn't even me doing some super clever marketing for that, I feel like I just made really good music and the people shared it.

**You're a very impeccable dresser so has fashion always been important to you?** You know, if I'm honest, I've never really cared about fashion. I always just slapped on a hoodie and trainers and trousers and walked out my house. But ever since I've been working with stylists, it's made me look at dressing in a whole different way - so now I look at it like a piece of music. Not everything works with everything but if you get the right things like production - once you get the right things to go together you don't even need to do too much but it saves so much time. I feel like that's how I look at dressing these days though so I feel like those stylists brought that out of me, shout out Maya, Jermaine Robinson and Juice.

## **"My brother introduced me to production and I just took it a bit too far didn't I?"**

**What's your go to look to make an impression?** I feel like my brand is up here, like when I cut my hair, it doesn't matter what I wear. As long as I cut my hair I just feel like, "yes, I look like me now." I feel like me in general, that's the first thing that I do.

**It's such a strong visual.** It's crazy because when I first started losing my hair, I was like, "how can I be an artist now?" But now it's like, "how can I not be an artist." When I look at it now, it's so interesting. It's character innit.









PLEASURES & Walter Van Beirendonck  
Boutique: Congruent Space



**We've been a fan since we first heard this member of the SAVEMONEY collective back in 2013. Following a name change to Kami Superstar, the Chicago MC is preparing to release new music, as he reveals he recorded a Leather Corduroys project with Joey Purp that's yet to be released. VIPER caught up with him in Chicago to talk about forming a rap group in fourth grade and the best spots to shop in Chi Town.**

**Who is Kami?** Kami is a product of the Earth, from Nigeria and Ghana, raised on the South Side of Chicago and representing Kene's art, music and ideas.

**How long have you been rapping?** Since forever! I remember writing my first raps in fourth grade with my homie Fresco, we wanted to be a Rap group. I remember telling my parents I wanted to be in a Rap group.

**"The first album I did was pretty progressive. At the time people weren't ready for that, then fast forward the next year or two, a lot of experimental music took that approach to those sounds."**

**How did your mother respond to that?** [Laughs] My mom's African so she told me to be a doctor, lawyer, or engineer, those were the only suitable choices. I think over the years we've learned a lot through Rap/Hip Hop, or music in general. All the things I've done, I don't think that my mother even knew it was possible to sustain a lifestyle off this. It's really a blessing, I get to do what I want. I think she's happy it provides.

**How did becoming a rapper begin for you?** I think I was just listening to hella Rap music, you always tend to emulate the things that are cool

to you and rappers have always been that. The first album I ever got, either I got it for Christmas or saved up, was 'Get Rich or Die Trying'. I came back from Africa when I was six years old. That was like first grade, I remember just seeing and hearing Rap music for the first time. The first Rap song I ever heard because I used to sing it all the time, was, 'Ms. Jackson'. After hearing that it was like a deep dive into everything.

**How did you get connected with the SAVEMONEY crew?** That's just us, we started it in High School. Seeing people who are similar to you in a not-so-similar setting, you all get drawn to each other. So we're in school and a lot of us are from the South Side and the West Side, attending this uppity school called Whitney Young. I went to boarding school under the my parents are African Act, we figured out that wasn't going to work and when I got back I had good enough grades to get into Whitney Young. My auntie knew the Principal so she hit her up and I got in. You gravitate to people who are like you so Joey, Nikko, Vic and Reese, we all started kicking it every day and became a family. There's no real moment where niggas shook their hands and lightning struck and we are now SaveMoney, it wasn't that. But "FUCK SAVEMONEY."

**What are you currently working on?** I haven't put out any music by myself in so long, since 2017. I've just been in a place where I felt like I really want to rediscover new sounds because I feel like the first album I did was pretty progressive. At the time people weren't ready for that, then fast forward the next year or two, a lot of experimental music took that approach to those sounds. I already did that so I need to make it a point to not repeat myself. I've been struggling to try to figure out what's the next moment that I can present to people. I've been working on it and I think I am happy with where it's landing.

**What new music has dropped and what's dropping next?** I just dropped a single called, 'Noah's Ark', the first song I've put out in the last two years by myself, just working on the video. We're about to put out another single right after that as well.



**Have you and Joey Purp conversed about another joint project?** It's not a matter of coming back, me and Joey made a whole album during 2020, we just didn't put it out yet. The songs still sound relevant and I am happy with them but timing is a big thing. At the same time, things get to a place where we overthink shit. It's there though, it's already done.

**Who is your favourite fashion designer?** My favourite fashion designer is Rei Kawakubo, she started Comme des Garçons. Being young Comme des was my favourite brand, but that is always changing to me, I appreciate a lot of different brands. She's probably my favourite fashion designer because of her story and her attention to detail. You go to Dover Street in New York and they change the layout so much, that type of stuff is so important to her. The same way somebody like Kanye kind of reintroduced the idea of a transforming album, now n\*\*\*\*s want to upload a song and then change it or add a feature. When he did that shit with 'Pablo', that same idea she's always found a crazy way to repurpose some shit over and over since she started. She's inspirational to me because the example I get from her is that you can always reintroduce an idea until you're comfortable with it.

**"Any opportunity where you get to learn from some shit you just enjoy listening to, that's a service not a lot of people are providing."**

**Where do you like to shop in Chicago?** I feel like the fashion industry in Chicago is pretty tight-knit, it's a smaller community than New York and Los Angeles. You have the homies, Joe, Rello, Vic Lloyd, all of them. You know Leaders, when we were young that's where we were shopping, that's what really introduced us to the idea of fashion being an art form. The type of apparel I wear always depends, I'm a slimmer dude so I do like European cuts of clothing. Prada provides a lot of basic silhouettes, they really focus on the fit of your clothes. My new favourite thing has been going to just try on clothes, nowadays especially after Covid hit everybody got so consumed with online shopping. Because of that I'll buy some shit that looks cool, but not everything that looks cool is for you. All new clothes look cool but it doesn't always make you

feel good. I'm into clothes that make you feel good that I can wear on a daily basis.

**Any others?** Congruent Space is just such a dope spot, they carry so many brands that people don't generally know about. Everybody's like "designer this. designer that," but it's only like six or seven designers that niggas be merchandising. There are so many local designers, so many designers in the world, it's a fucking huge world. There's so many different cultures of design, so many schools and thoughts of design, so it's interesting to see how you can take from all of those different things and apply them to your style.

**Who is the most influential artist to you?** Lil Wayne would probably be the most influential artist to me personally. He made me appreciate the intensity of rapping. Musical artistry, there's a lot of things I've learned from people like Dre or Eminem even, just in terms of approaching things from a Hip Hop standpoint experimentally, like not being afraid to tackle different things. Wayne taught us that too, but Wayne was just so cool that he couldn't exist in every different world. Not saying Dre wasn't but Dre was cool in a different way where he made himself, he was so comfortable he was cool. Later in life I got into Jay Z, and even getting older he has become one of my favourite artists because of the knowledge he imparts through his music based on his life. Any opportunity where you get to learn from some shit you just enjoy listening to, that's a service not a lot of people are providing.

**Who would you like to collab with musically?** Right now I want to make a song with BK Tha Ruler, she's super dope to me. I literally have a song that I have in mind that I'd love if she blessed that bitch.

**Where are your parents from? Does your culture inspire your music and fashion?** My mother is from Ghana and my father is Nigerian. My mom had a crazy life, she left Ghana when she was sixteen and lived in London for a while. She is a fashion designer, so growing up I just always had this appreciation for fashion because I was always around clothes - I always cared how I look. Even though I'm not as tapped in with my Nigerian roots and my Ghanaian roots, culturally Nigerians have been known to have pride in how they dress. Then growing up here and going to Chicago Public Schools, n\*\*\*\*s just make fun of you if you dress badly, off that pressure alone you wanted to be flee.







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ShaSimone

Bralet: Moons & Junes  
Shirt: ASOS  
Trousers: K3myo Plus  
Jewellery: Shedeane Jewels

Creative Director : Eddie Cheaba   Photographer: Rene Connage   Stylist: Flowerchild  
Hair Stylist: Pashcan'el Mitchell   Aesthetician : Mercedez Jay   Styling Assistant: Drew Streeter-Porter  
Mua: Milan BTS: Faysal Hassan Studio: Blankbox Studio



**Her uncredited verse on Dave's album 'We're All Alone in This Together', had the whole of the UK asking, "who's that girl?!" With a handful of tracks under her belt, Hackney's ShaSimone was catapulted into the upper echelons of London's rap scene. Don't sleep on her, even Stormzy's a fan. Get to know her via this VIPER interview, in which she reveals her favourite lyric and how that Dave session came about.**

**2021 has been a big breakthrough year for your music career, what's been the highlight this year?** For me the best part has been the festivals this year. It was incredible experiencing everyone and performing in front of big crowds and people actually seeing me, it's just been crazy.

**Tell me a bit about your musical journey prior to 2020. How did you start to record and drop your first release?** I've always been writing music from a young age but I never really had the confidence to do it. I started recording probably like five years ago, it's only last year that I thought I really want to go for it and just put my music out there and let people hear me. I finally got the confidence to do it, I've been doing music for a long time but I've only been releasing for about a year now. It's been happening so fast and yeah, it's been crazy.

**"Every time I think  
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best ever I'll write  
something else and  
I'll be like, "Nah,  
I think this is the  
best ever."**

**It's funny you say that about confidence because you always sound so confident. Even from the first release you made an impact with your sound.** It was there privately but publicly it wasn't quite there, it took a lot of me going through things in my personal life and stuff to really give me the courage. I feel like now is the best time to do it, maybe I wouldn't have been 100% ready a year or two ago. But I feel like everything has just been working together for me to be where I am right now, in terms of confidence and personal development, and stuff like that.

**Did you feel it was best to sit on it until you're**

**ready?** Yeah, but then again, I feel like you're never really ready. Life just pushes you into certain things and you just have to adapt. Situations, they kind of evolve you into who you're supposed to be and I think that's what happened with me. I had to go through a lot in order for me to have the confidence to do this now.

**So tell me when was the moment in your life where you were convinced this would be your career?** I never really thought that until last year, because I was always doing music but I was doing hair - I was working in different salons. It's just the ease of writing, nothing felt forced, everything has just been so simple. Meeting certain people and the certain opportunities that have been given, it's just been so easy and like nothing was forced. So I think that's what kind of showed me maybe this is it, because I'm not forcing it. It's like nothing else in my life, where I'm really just doing too much or just so confused about everything. This has literally just been the door wide open and the journey has just been so simple.

**Do you believe in fate?** 100%. Yeah, I do, 100% and I think everything that's been happening was definitely destined to happen.

**You're from east London but whereabouts in east?** I'm from Hackney.

**Me too, where?** I'm from Stoke Newington born and raised

**I went to Stoke Newington school too.** Oh my god you're lying. I went there as well.

**Do you know I love this because Stoke Newington's got so much good talent and you're very much up there! How did Hackney help put you onto music at an early age?** My friends in school and listening to music in the playgrounds, we listened to a lot of Bashment like Vybz Kartel or Afrobeats, a lot of the hood stuff like Rimzee, Sneakbo.

**You tweeted "Every artist has that "this is the realest shit I ever wrote" moment." So can you tell me what you were writing?** Yeah, I wrote a Next Up and it was just so deep because I feel like with music right now I'm trying to get more deep. I want there to be a lot of substance with my music, in terms of lyricism, in terms of



topics. I feel like the best type of rappers are very vulnerable and very transparent in their music, that's something that I've really, really been trying to tap into. Yesterday was a moment where it's like, 'Damn, this is like some real shit,' and I just really felt it. To me, the best type of raps, they always make me shed a tear or just slowly thinking "wow, this is so real." I really feel this and I had that moment yesterday, it's mad because every time I think I've written my best ever I'll write something else and I'll be like, "Nah, I think this is the best ever." It's just like a cycle and it's always ongoing, writing my best. So yeah, yesterday was definitely one of those moments and I can't wait for everyone to hear it because I think it is realist shit I've written to date and maybe next week I'll probably write the realist shit again but yeah, it was just lit.

**Do you feel that you're almost competing with yourself?** Yeah and that's basically what I'm saying in the rap as well basically, that the only person that I'm trying to beat is myself. The person I'm looking in the mirror is always the person I'm trying to be better than and no one else.

**You've got some of the slickest one liners and like the wordplay is different! So do you have a favourite one liner that you've written? What's the bar that you're like you hold up above all others?** There's too many but one that I've been living by the past couple of weeks is "don't take paracetamol for someone else's headache." I don't know if I heard it in a Nollywood film or something because it's such an African saying

## **"Women don't need to overly sexualise themselves for them to be in the limelight."**

but it's just so true. You can't take paracetamol for someone else's headache, meaning you can't take on someone else's problems as your own, you just have to focus on yourself. So yeah, that's one I've just been riding by for the past few weeks.

**Your lyrics are spicy, you own statements about sex without sounding promiscuous.** With me, I don't like to be too vulgar with it, it needs to be artistic. It can't be too obvious, it needs to be entertaining. So that's one thing I definitely try to do, not make it too in your face. Because I feel like everything is just so in your face right now.

**It's not easy to do, Rapsody and Simz have that same vibe.** I've really been loving Little Simz right now. To me, she is there with the greats, like the greatest MCs that the UK has seen and that's where I'm definitely trying to be - I'm trying to be up there with her. She's who I aspire to be lyrically and integrity wise, 100%. I absolutely love her and every time I need some new inspiration I literally tap into her album. Have you heard it by the way? It's amazing.

**Yeah, it's so good all the time and it got to four in the charts!** She deserves it man, I don't think the UK has had a female rapper like this and she's just incredible. She's so herself, she's not trying to be like anyone which I love. So yeah, shout out to Little Simz.

**You shot your amazing video first 'Back To Sender' in Ghana, so what was the experience like?** Yeah I did that in Ghana, Jamestown. That was like the most humbling experience ever, just being around people that didn't really have much. To them, they've got the world, they have so much life and they're just so happy with the little that they have. It was incredible man, very, very humbling and heart-warming. It was a crazy experience trying to film in the heat as well because it was like 40 degrees, I got makeup on, it was crazy. The behind the scenes of that, I wish I had some clips but I was dying on the part that you don't see. It looks amazing on the camera, it was lit, I can't wait to go to Ghana and do some more stuff 'cause it was too lit!

**What about collaborations, are there any Ghanaian rappers that you'd like to work with?** There was Ghana Party in the Park in July and I met up with quite a few of the Ghanaian Drill artists. There's some that I'd definitely like to work with, two rappers called Yaw Tog and Kofi Jamar. They're really popping in the scene right now, I'm definitely going to link up with them when I go to Ghana and hopefully get some things going on, they're proper lit.

**Have you got any collaborations on the horizon?** I don't know about on the horizon, but there's definitely some Afrobeats that I would love to work with. Wizkid 100%, Burna Boy, I'm loving Omah Lay, Fireboy, there's so many. The Afrobeats scene right now is very, very lit and hopefully when I go back home I can definitely link up with some of them.

**Have you got any plans to release a project in the near future as well?** Yeah, I've got more than enough, I've kinda got a project there already and it's so crazy because I've been doing it subconsciously - just writing and making music towards it. There's a project 100% just sitting there, but right now I'm focusing mostly towards











singles and just solidifying myself. A project will probably come maybe at the beginning of the year or midway through the year so I have a body of work for people to hear. But yeah, definitely on the way, I might even just drop it spontaneously. I'm not too sure yet but it's gonna be lit and I feel like people are definitely going to hear more sides of me and not just one thing. I'm excited for that.

**I feel like it's definitely going to be much appreciated because especially like you appearing on the Dave album, I bet a lot of people were immediately looking for a project from you.** Yeah, they wanted to hear more for sure. They wanted to definitely hear more but it's on the way and I'm excited for everyone to hear it.

**How did you feel when you got the call for the Dave feature?** Oh my god, that day was so insane! It was just a normal day, I woke up and went to the gym. A producer called Sammy Sosa that I'm quite close with - shout out Sammy - he's so dope. He called me and they couldn't say who, it was confidential at the time, but they're like, "somebody's heard your work, I passed it on to him and he said he really likes your raps and he would like for you to be on the album." I was just thinking, hmm, this is interesting. I said, "Okay, cool, speak to my manager." So then I just went about my day and then I had a session with a producer called Happy. So they called me back again halfway through my session, they were like, "hey, we're gonna need you to come and record for the artist's session. By the way, it's Dave." I nearly dropped the phone. I just looked at my manager, like, what the hell? So then we come to the place now and for some reason I wasn't expecting him to be there. I just thought they wanted me to come, lay the vocals and that's it, but I've literally gone in there, walked in and he's just sitting there. I was just like wow and then he embraced me and I gave him a hug. That day was the most surreal experience. I think I got there at eight o'clock and I was there 'til three in the morning, just talking. He was giving me so much advice on music and going back to back rapping. It was crazy and I didn't even record any of it. The best nights you don't film any of it. You don't even want to look at your phone, it was just one of those moments and something that I'll treasure forever. Dave is just such a dope guy. He's wise beyond his years so it was an incredible experience and I really appreciate it.

**So who else has had you starstruck like that?** Stormzy. 100% Both times I've seen Stormzy, he's cool with me and I'm just like, "What is going on?" The last time I saw Stormzy, I was walking around at Parklife and he was like, "Yo, superstar." I couldn't even see who it was because he was ballied up and he had his shades on. He was like, "it's me, Stormz man," I was like, "What?" Then he came to my dressing room, he was taking bare pictures and he was



gassing me up for the performance. That was epic, Stormzy is so lit, he's proper, proper good vibes.

**How do you feel about coming into the Hip Hop industry now, as opposed to a few years ago? Do you feel like it's a more open space to work in for a woman?** Definitely, I feel like people are more accepting of people that are different and not just sticking to one formula. Women don't need to overly sexualise themselves for them to be in the limelight. I feel like people are definitely more accepting, you can be unapologetically yourself and the doors are wide open for people that are different. I just feel like you don't need to be like anyone else. You can just be yourself and be different, because no one really wants to hear the same thing, that's a bit boring. We want to hear about you and who you are, not like what 100,000 other people are saying. So I think the door is wide open for everyone that wants to be different.

**When will we get new music?** I've got a new single, it's called 'Hushpuppi', I'll be dropping a snippet real soon. But yeah, the visuals are crazy, the song is crazy as well and I can't wait for everyone to hear it.

**Named after Hushpuppi the man?** Yeah kinda, the song is just about living larger than life - he definitely inspired it. I think the time that I made it, it was when he literally got grabbed up. The video is just literally exuding black luxury, I'm excited for everyone to see that one.



# 34 Juls maps out the Sounds of his World





"Yeah I get that a lot and it's always great to hear," was the humble response from internationally syndicated producer Juls, when I let him know that 'True Love' was my favourite song on Wizkid's globally acclaimed album 'Made in Lagos'. If that wasn't enough, in the following week Wizkid finally confessed that the same song featuring Tay Iwar and Projexx was his own personal favourite. Produced by Juls - and originally set to be on his album - the timeless tune is infused with an intoxicatingly smooth saxophone and seductive guitar strums. It's all topped off with a salute to the go-to of African music: percussion from traditional drums. Not overdone, never forced, the sound was the perfect introduction and taster of what to expect from Juls on his solo project. It encompasses what he's all about: well thought out and well composed music. Music that digs deep into the sounds of Africa and the world that we grew up on, making it palatable for the modern day. This assumption was proved right once his debut album 'Sounds of My World' was released.

## **"I believe the sound I created kinda shaped the sound of modern Afrobeats"**

VIPER was lucky enough to catch up with Juls on the afternoon of the release day. It was surprising to hear how calm and relaxed he was throughout the conversation. There was a clear sense of relief that the music was finally out, like he had come to terms with everything and was at peace knowing he's put his authentic self within the album. A feeling creatives know very well, his calmness made sense considering his friends had given their approval in advance. He explains "My closest ones have heard the album before, they like what they hear. I'm the type of person who doesn't feed into things too much. I listened to the album [in full] for the first time when it came out at midnight, driving around. I'll probably do the same thing again today."

His peaceful demeanour could also be due to the fact that Juls is not new to the music game. He's best known for singlehandedly transforming Afrobeats in the early 2010s, partnering up with VIPER's former cover star, the then unknown Mr. Eazi and his signature deep and steady voice. It was a risky switch up from the fast paced and loud Azonto club hits we were used to. Though Afrobeats was a product of diversity, the sound was yet to offer the world different examples of new African music. It had become

a one-size-fits-all genre for a while but that all changed with Juls. He says "I had discovered Mr. Eazi on Twitter, we [obviously] made a few hits together. We had a good run, I believe the sound I created kinda shaped the sound of modern Afrobeats," he states swiftly, as though he'd already checked it off and was looking to the future.

Like all greats, his successful career began as a side-hustle, "My background was finance, I started making beats as a hobby. I started on Fruity Loops, Reason and just got good at it and started building my craft. I've been making beats since 2007, I started doing it professionally in 2014 then quit my full time job in 2018." The risk paid off with Juls bringing a more grown up sound to a flowering Afrobeats industry that was still in its infancy, especially to the outside world. His sound brought a more well-rounded and cultured introduction to the new wave of African music. "[My work] started attracting the likes of Wande Coal, Burna Boy," whom he crafted several hits for, "then working with Maleek Berry and on an international scale, Goldlink and Sango."

Throughout our conversation, Juls effortlessly lists the names of artists he's worked with without hesitation. It's clear he cherishes and respects the relationships he has built along the way, as if he had compartmentalised each name and attached them to different monumental parts - or eras - of his musical journey. They trigger different milestones and memories like a holiday would, the album title makes perfect sense at this point. He does the same for the artists he worked with on the new project. I ask whether the pandemic affected who he could physically work with and he explains, "I was [physically] in the studio with Jaz Karis, Wizkid, George the Poet, King Promise, Darko Vibes and Joey B, Soundwise, Knucks, Sauti Sol, Kojo Funds, Mayra Andrade, quite a few." He adds that the studio was built from scratch to accommodate this yearning he had for new music, "I had been making music, singles and EPs here and there, learning on the job. I definitely needed these two and a bit years to kinda understand and build the brand and experience a lot more."

Identifying as both Ghanaian and British equally, Juls has grown up in two places where being reserved and quiet isn't uncommon. Time and again Ghana has been voted one of the most peaceful nations in Africa and we've all heard of the British 'stiff upper lip'. With minimal but effective words, he expresses that he lets his music do the talking and uses it to show who he is and what he's about, "my music speaks for itself and reflects my personality." However in this "new era," he's open to revealing more of himself to his fans, saying "it's weird because people don't really get to experience me [face





Jackets: Daily Paper  
Shirt: Daily Paper  
Socks: Gucci





to face] that much as I don't really go out as much or do too much. But I'm going to start doing that, I've got plans to reveal a lot more of my personality. I wanna take my time and do a few things throughout the month, talk about the tracks, break it down, do some visuals, short films. I wanna travel and play the music to different people and engage different audiences."

**"It's always good to hear people say that they like the fact that you challenge them and convince them to do something out of their comfort zone"**

Juls kept his word, pushing out of his comfort zone, hosting numerous events including listening parties at the Daily Paper London flagship store. He's also brought supporters into his musical space with signings, meet and greets, sip 'n' paints, track by track discussions at Soho House and back to back interviews. As is always the aim for Juls, he states, "Give the people good vibes, let them feel it."

Along with the visuals for 'Love Me' featuring Niniola, 'Intentionally' with Fireboy DML and 'Wicked' alongside Knucks and Sam Wise, this promo rollout has contributed to more than 5 million Spotify streams on the album in under a month. Throughout our conversation Juls emphasises that his approach to music is wholly "spiritual and experimental," he defines it as an approach focused on a feeling and "good vibes."

Having listened to the album in the early hours before we spoke, it became obvious that it's all about bridging the unspoken disconnect between various regions of the world. A project doesn't get more international than this. One example is Mayra Andrade, the songstress featured on 'Love Language', who hails from Cape Verde and has lived in both Cuba and France. In true producer fashion, Juls merges cultural differences and similarities to make one seamless body of work. Leaving no area of inspiration out, he showcases the parts that come together to create his artistic world. It reflects well in the album, displaying Juls' skill



as a musical alchemist and his ability to travel around the world, source and pull from the best of past and present sounds, creating a perfect musical formula that works well collectively.

The songs take turns to celebrate the best music of the diaspora. Throughout the body of work you hear hints of Brazilian samba, heavily reliant on shakers and heavy drums. You'll also notice riddims that resemble the Caribbean Soca, Dancehall and Dub culture, native to the islands and London's beloved Notting Hill Carnival. True Soca fans will even recognise the instructive 'Go Down' hook from Denise Belfon looped in this album too. Then there's various speeds and flows of UK Rap from artists like Knucks and Suspect OTB. Juls' global approach to music is interesting, considering that the main instrument used in Brazilian Samba - a key component of this album's sound - derives from West Africa, known in Nigeria as the Yoruba Agogo bell. Ghana also has a bell similar to the Agogo known as the Dawuro bell, used for ceremonial Adowa dancing; just one of many instruments with an international history.

Like history, all roads on the album lead back to one place: Africa. Juls tapped into the best of South Africa's buzzing Amapiano vibes that are currently taking over the world. That's blended against the voices of the hottest artists of Nigeria; Niniola, Fireboy DML and eccentric rising star Prettyboy D-O. There's guest appearances from East Africa: Kenya's Sauti Sol, Xenia Manasseh and Karun, not forgetting



homegrown talent like WSTRN's crooner Haile. As Juls says himself, it's very experimental but it works. He explains, "it's always good to hear people say that they like the fact that you challenge them and convince them to do something out of their comfort zone," speaking specifically about Niniola and Haile's response to their inclusion on the album.

Juls is true to this, explaining that his music is inspired by cultures he's taken in first-hand. He spoke passionately about his trips to South Africa's Soweto and its townships, seeing the struggle and happiness meshing with the famous artists of Johannesburg and surrounding areas. From Busiswa to DJ Maphorisa, Moonchild and "the Twins" Major League DJz, Juls casually named drops the best of the Afro-house Amapiano artists of SA, whom he now calls friends.

Of course, by travelling to Ghana frequently he still keeps connected to his love for traditional Afrobeats. From Nigeria's first superstar Fela Kuti to the Highlife genre of Ghana, Juls proves in this album how much of an impact they were in his upbringing and musical journey, speaking candidly about this being the music "our mums, aunties and uncles played around the house." It's clear from the album that he's still connected to the new wave in Ghana, with popular terminology, idioms, sayings and even popular memes thoughtfully placed on tracks featuring hit-makers from the Gold Coast, King Promise and Joey B.

He still has South America on his travel bucket list, saying "I haven't been to South America and Latin America yet, but I have a lot of DJs and producers in that world who I speak to on a regular basis who teach me about these things as well." Like a musical diplomat, Juls has successfully translated what it's like to live in a cultural melting pot like London. Places where you'd hear a variety of sounds growing up, for example the vibrancy of Brixton's Jamaican roots, to the underground sounds that gave east London and its pirate radio stations notoriety.

Songs like 'Wicked' should remind you of raves, House-inspired songs like 'Summer in the Ends' will remind you of...well exactly that; summers in the ends. Juls states, "Being a Londoner, we're exposed to so many different genres of music because it's so multicultural and diverse, we've got Jungle, Dancehall, Garage."

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Juls still keeps his ear to the streets, despite being established he still makes time for upcoming musicians on this project. Knucks is respected for his alternative approach to UK Rap, with a clear and confident delivery close to poetry. Juls confirms this saying, "my brother in law put me on to Knucks, they were bumping him in Uni heavy! He also put me on to Kadiata and Sam Wise, their sound is a lot different to the typical, commercial-type Rap out here in the UK. I like that about them and wanted to learn from them, build a relationship and build something dope from that."

With 'Sounds of My World' Juls has mapped out his sonic journey, transporting us to various regions and cultures using a common language: music. Juls' vast and extensive knowledge of music history and his willingness to keep learning is a lesson for other artists: great music requires a world of knowledge and culture.





Shirt: Daily PaperTrousers: Marc Jacques Burton  
Jewellery: Feather Pendants



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# Tomí Agape





**Hailing from North West London, Tomi Agape is bridging the gap between Nigeria's Alté scene and UK Afrobeats. Since collaborating with Juls, she's worked with many of Lagos' new wave talents. She talks to VIPER about lucid dreaming, iconic outfits and her stunning project, 'Never Gonna Be The Same'.**

**So tell me a bit about your start in music.** I've always sung since I was really young, I used to sing in the choir at church. I was the only little girl in a big choir, like the main choir. In school there'd be little singing competitions and there was this place in my area that had a studio, like an after school youth club and it had a studio. You could go in for an hour and record, that was when CDs were a thing so you'd get to record then they put your song onto a CD for you. I used to do that a lot when I was 15 but they weren't my real songs, they're nowhere to be found, I don't even know where they are. I think that was my first time knowing what it was like to record on a mic, then when I got to uni, I recorded my very first song when I was in first year. I knew I wanted to do music seriously but I didn't know how to get in and then I met Juls. I was recording with a guy called Jay Rox, a producer who's actually quite big, he does a lot of UK stuff. Then I met Juls through a mutual friend when I was 19 and we recorded a song. I would say from second year of uni, that's when I started to really record properly and then when I left uni, that's when I was able to really get into it properly. So 19 is when I first properly started and when I was 22, that's when it was more serious.

**"Boj is one of my closest friends, our mum's went to school together."**

**Was your degree music related?** It was theatre, it was in the arts. I like acting, that's something I really want to get into. Especially now, I've been saying recently that I want to get an agent because I'm quite good at acting. I got an unconditional offer to do acting, I just did a monologue and they were like "yeah." Which is great because I didn't pass maths GCSE or A-level so that was perfect for me.

**What's maths when you got that voice?! Did you always know you were gonna do something creative with music and drama?** I've just always been an entertainer, I always loved to write, either entertainment or something in English like journalism. I didn't know what it was

going to be but I was really good at English too. I see English as a creative subject so I knew it would have to be something creative in some way for sure.

**Afrobeats is huge in the UK now but back then were you singing on more R&B tracks?** It was definitely more R&B, Neo-Soul stuff which I still love now to be honest. I feel like I infuse those sounds and Dancehall and Afrobeats altogether but back then Afrobeats wasn't really big like that. It was definitely more Neo-Soul, R&B types of music I was doing.

**I love that you've very much managed to avoid the lane of just singing hooks on Rap songs, but were there any rappers back then that wanted a hook from you?** Yes there was this rapper from my area, I forget his name. I'm sure it's on YouTube somewhere which is so embarrassing, but my name wasn't Tomi Agape it was Tomi Vocals back then. So I definitely did a hook for a rapper once but I would still avoid it back then. I don't just do anything because I feel like I only do things that feel right, I would definitely work with a rapper now but it would have to be the right rapper.

**Would you experiment with rapping yourself? Because you've got that flair.** I definitely rap as well, I just haven't put out songs. I have freestyles on my highlights on Instagram and everyone's like "you literally need to put out a Rap song." Because I like writing, I'm a writer as well so I actually love Rap but I just haven't put out a Rap song on my own. I think I will, maybe now's the time.

**You're one of the most prominent women in the Alté scene. Being in the UK rather than in Nigeria, did you find it harder?** I don't feel like I tried to be in that scene, it just happened. I was literally doing the music that felt right for me and it just ended up clicking there, which is interesting because it just shows me that there's other people [like me]. Obviously my genre is hard to describe so when I found other people who are in the same boat as me, I was like "oh wow, great, it's not just me!" I'm not 100% Afrobeats and I'm not 100% an R&B singer so that alternative sound is nice because it allows us to be in a space where we can literally do whatever and people just accept it because it's like, "okay, yeah she's alternative." Really Alté just means alternative to whatever is popular. When Jules put me on his first EP 'Leap Of Faith',



he put me and Santi on the same song 'After Six' and Santi has a very strong fan base in Nigeria so when we put that song out in 2017 or 2018, that's when Nigeria was like "who is this Tomi Agape girl?" Anything I dropped after that, they just gravitated to it.

**I loved the Cruel Santino song 'Rapid Fire'.** I can remember recording my bit for it in Atlanta in 2017 and I knew that song was gonna be big. I remember telling him, this needs to be a single and at the time he wasn't even sure if it should be a single but that's one of his biggest songs.

**Were you on holiday in Atlanta or was that a work trip?** That particular one was a holiday, I used to live there. I lived there for four years so I go back whenever, I've still got family there, cousins, my older brother lives there. My dad just moved from there to Portugal but Atlanta's almost like a second home to be honest.

**How does that influence your sound because obviously that's the home of Trap music!** It's crazy 'cause I don't feel like it influences my sound at all. I was really young the first time I lived there, the second time I was a teenager, 14 years old. Maybe if I was living there right now it might have influenced my music but back then I was still young and finding myself. I don't think it influenced my sound really, it just feels like another home.

**What about your style?** Being from Atlanta? Not really I feel like we dress better over here,

**"I love working with women as well because I'm such a girl's girl, I really want to see girls win."**

people from Europe in my opinion dress better than Americans as a whole. I feel like my style is whatever I think looks sick and would look good on me. I just try to dress for my body type, I'm not gonna wear things that a girl with really big boobs should be wearing because it's not gonna suit me, I don't have the breasts for it. I can plan a whole outfit for a show and then maybe wake up on the day and be like "no I'm not even feeling that" and just change it. It's very temperamental, my mood changes but I love fashion and I have so much fun with it, it's like a costume. I love it so much, I feel like that's part of the fun, being able to dress up and be whoever you want to be that day and be allowed to get away with it.

**Do you have a memorable outfit that you've performed in?** I did an online live stream for SXSW at the beginning of this year and I wore this really cool brand, ChetLo. Their stuff looks

like when you're in the recording studio, you know the foam on the walls? Their stuff looks like that but colourful. My stylist Jermaine, he's sick, he pulled it for me and it was really hard to perform in because it was so short my butt was literally hanging out at the back. But because it was an online thing it was okay because no one's really there so you couldn't notice. That was a sick outfit, it was really nice and bright and I wore these red boots. That look was so sick, I think that was my favourite.

**Why did you choose the title, 'Never Gonna Be The Same' for your last project?** I felt like it was very fitting because the whole world was changing, the world came to a standstill after this COVID stuff. We were in lockdown and it just felt like nothing was going to be the same, literally nothing is going to be the same. We're not going to be the same, the way we view things is not going to be the same, the way we approach people, people don't even really hug people they don't know much anymore. Everything's changed so I felt like I wasn't going to be the same after that. I wasn't going to be the same after releasing the project because that was my first body of work that I've put out. So it just felt right, I didn't really overthink it too much but it just came to me.

**Your features put me onto several new artists, is it important to you to bring in artists that maybe aren't everywhere in UK music?** It's interesting because obviously in Ghana, Nigeria, they're really big. Here especially Amaarae, she's getting really big here too. It's not on purpose, I'm just working with the people that I want to work with that are my friends as well, like Boj. He's one of my closest friends, our mum's went to school together, we didn't know that when we became friends, we found that out later. Then Amaarae, we worked together on 'Rapid Fire' and I just think she's dope. I love working with women as well because I'm such a girl's girl, I really want to see girls win. If I can help other people become aware of an artist I think that's great. It helps us both ways really because she has a fanbase that might not know me and now they know me. Or Boj's fanbase, now they know me. I think it helps all of us honestly and I don't like to do features that aren't necessary. Some artists just do feature, feature, feature. Me, I'm not really like that. If it's meant to be and it works and it makes sense for the song, then yeah.

**You and Amaarae's voices compliment each other, her high pitch goes well with your mid pitch.** Definitely, her voice is really airy and soft, it's almost like a fairy and then mine is a bit thicker.

**Obviously we're very appreciative of Afrobeats but do you feel that the UK loves its own Afrobeats artists enough or do you**









Earrings: Shaun Leane  
Rings: Bleu Burnham  
Top: Hyo-Isak  
Jacket: Lola Turner  
Jeans: Hyo-Isak



**think there's some work to be done there?** I think there's definitely some work to be done there, there's a saying about someone who is not appreciated in their own hometown. A lot of people don't even think I'm from here, I've met people that have heard my accent and said "oh my god, you're from London." They think I live in Nigeria or maybe I schooled there and I've just come here now. So when they hear me talk, I think it's because of the scene I've been placed in, it seems that I'm Nigerian from Nigeria but I'm Nigerian from here, I'm a London girl through and through. I feel that the UK has some work to do to appreciate its own, that's in general. If you're not Rap I feel like it's hard to be here. Even just R&B singers over here, didn't Ella Mai have to go to America before people started fucking with her properly? It's crazy as a whole the UK appreciates UK Rap, if it's not that it's gonna be a bit hard for you.

**There's an Afro-swing scene and Afro-Soul scene but do you think everything is so separate within them that we almost need more artists in both?** Yeah I think we need more of a scene here with those things and then it will become more of a thing. Because here it's like there's more of a Rap scene, that's the biggest thing here. Or the Afro-swing/Rap sort of stuff because that's what Rap is now, a lot of it is Afro-swing unless it's Drill. A lot of UK rappers are Afro-inspired, like NSG do Afrobeats but they're

**"I feel that the UK has some work to do to appreciate its own, that's in general. If you're not rap I feel like it's hard to be here."**

also rappers so I would call that Afro-swing. I feel like that needs to be more of a scene of other things for sure. I wonder sometimes, is it gonna be just Rap forever over here? Are they ever gonna appreciate other genres? I feel like people fuck with me here, because I'm not as big as I could be or that I want to be one day. But I feel like the people that do help me here talk to me because even though they know I'm from here, because of the scene I'm in they still see that scene as an international scene, it's not a UK scene. People see the Alté scene as an exclusive scene like, "if you know you know" type of thing; it's just interesting the way music is perceived.

**It is changing but do you feel the Afrobeats scene is very male dominated, like the way Dancehall was through the nineties?** Yeah, I do think so. Right now it feels that women in

the Afrobeats scene are doing really well and I'm loving it because it just creates more space for more of us. But as a whole I feel like unless you just have like a sudden surge of everyone fucking with you like a Tems right now or Amaarae or certain people, it's difficult. Because you see an Afrobeats male dropping an album, like if Wiz or Davido or Burna are about to drop, the hype around that is insane. If a female artist drops it's like there's a hype but it's not as hyped up as the men and that's just what I believe and I don't know what that is, I don't know why that is. I feel like it's still this thing of like I just feel like men get more attention in this industry as a whole. I feel like there could be loads of men at the top and then there's a few women and I want that to change; I don't feel like it's right.

**It's true even Tiwa Savage's project didn't seem to get as much of a reception as it should have considering she is at the top.** Exactly, she's up there! Like come on, she's literally up there with the Wizkids or the Davidos, she's been in this game for so long. She's put in so much work, so if her album is still not getting the same reception as the men it just makes you think what is this? Why?

**You speak about lucid dreaming on your song 'London'. How does that affect you; does it make you creative in ways or is it just frustrating?**

It's not frustrating, I've become so used to it because it's been happening to me since I was really young. I get lucid dreams and I also get sleep paralysis but the sleep paralysis for some reason hasn't been happening as often as it used to. It only really happens if I sleep on my back but if I fall asleep on my back I used to get sleep paralysis or a nightmare, it's crazy. Anytime I fall asleep on my back I have a nightmare, it doesn't matter. I might not get sleep paralysis but I will always have a nightmare or bad dream. I notice because I wake up and I sit straight up so I know I must have fallen asleep in my back. But the lucid dreaming I feel like that happens when I'm stressed or very overworked. I have anxiety and it's so funny because I am a very confident person. I get DMs from girls talking to me about how they love how body positive or confident I am but I definitely still have my times where I'm overthinking, I'm anxious. I get anxiety so bad sometimes that I feel like I'm going to vomit. I'll be talking to myself and trying to breathe in and out with my stomach. It's literally so knotted up it feels like there's 1000 butterflies in my tummy, it's crazy. But those are the times where I get lucid dreams and it's not bad or good, it just happens when I'm in a fragile state. I think that's when I get those sort of lucid dreams where they feel almost too real like scarily real, it's insane. There's literally times where I've woken up from a dream like that and it takes hours to get over the dream because I can't believe that it wasn't real.





**Have you ever woken up and been inspired by it? Or are you too tired?** Never. Honestly, it's just like 'Oh yeah, that happened again'. I wanna say something cool like "yeah, I wake up and I start writing" but no it is what it is. I know people that purposely go into a lucid dream so that they can do certain things. I know people that have said that they only know they were dreaming because they go to a mirror and they can't see a reflection of themselves or they look down at their hands and they've got nine fingers instead of 10 and that's when they know it's a dream. I never tried to make myself go into that, it just happens. Sleep and your mind are the most powerful, that's why when I don't take mental health for a joke because your mind can literally drive you insane. The fact that we can be asleep and feel all those emotions in our sleep, it's just our heads; we're not even awake. That to me is insane, that shows you how powerful our mind is.

**What are your plans for new music?** I have music there, I'm always recording. For the past few months I actually haven't been recording, I used to feel guilty about feeling like that but I now I've accepted that if I'm just not inspired or I can't record because I'm not in that headspace, I'm not going to force myself to. That's how I've

been feeling, I used to feel so guilty about that like "oh my god what's going on? Why am I not inspired to record? Why do I not feel like going to the studio? Why have I got a session and all I want to do is cancel it?" That used to really scare me but I've accepted that actually I'm human and you can check out from some things, it doesn't mean you don't love it anymore; it doesn't mean it's not your passion. I haven't been recording for a bit but I have music and I'm just trying to figure out if I want to do a single or if I want to do a mini project. I haven't really decided but I do know that I want to do some live sessions where I post on YouTube. I love performing so I want to do something where I can get a band or a guitarist or whatever and record a live session and post that for people to listen to, just hearing me sing, hearing my voice and the purity of music at its rawest form. Because sometimes it just seems like you go to the studio, drop a song, put it out, everyone listens to it and after a week they're asking when you're dropping something else. Sometimes I just want to do something different so I'm definitely going to drop new music, I'm not sure when but I will for sure. I'm trying to work on something a bit more creative where people can just vibe and hear my voice and appreciate a song in its truest form, that's important to me.

**Especially with your vocals, it's amazing to do something that can show the rawness because your voice is really special.** People that have been fans of my music from the beginning will know that I used to properly sing more before but for instance 'London' is almost rapping. It's not even like singing so some people might not know that I actually sing. Sometimes it's nice to just remind people that I can sing for real, this is not just auto tune.

**Sometimes there's more personality in stripped down, or acoustic versions.** Yeah, even when we're recording in the studio I've told engineers to not take my breaths out because when you're singing, you breathe in between another note or another word but in the studio, the engineer will take out those breaths. I remember listening to songs like "this doesn't sound right to me, can you put my breaths back in?" Why am I able to just sing straight with no breathing? A live version shows you breathing, it just feels raw, it feels real. So now engineers kind of do it across the board and sometimes it works, it depends on the type of song but I think if you're singing you should leave the breaths so it sounds real.

**Yeah it's like analog versus digital.** Exactly, even just listening to old school music it just feels different, even though obviously the beats are different but even how they're recorded it sounds so different, it's not as clean and as crisp as it is right now, it's cool.





Earrings: Veroniki Hadjistefanou  
Top: Veroniki Hadjistefanou  
Skirt: Veroniki Hadjistefanou  
Footwear: Naked Wolfe







**With his debut solo EP 'Arrested By Love' dropping this Autumn, we talk to one of Nigeria's newest icons about fatherhood, African diaspora and how watching Nollywood films in lockdown became a source of nostalgia and inspiration. As one of the founders of DRB Las Gidi, Teezee is at the forefront of his country's cultural revolution. He talks to VIPER about launching Native and the new wave of talents in his city.**

**How did you team up and form DRB Las Gidi?**

We were childhood friends. We all had similar interests in secondary school so we were making music together organically. We were also friends and on the same football teams, it just evolved into a brotherhood.

**Did you imagine getting to the stage you're at now, where you're superstars and doing what you love for a living?** At the time we started, we definitely weren't thinking that far, it was just fun; it was a way of expressing ourselves and creating. But over the last few years we've definitely had more of a retrospective view on things. It's amazing that what we were doing for fun, as shits and giggles became this big thing that we're doing now.

**"That's the mission, to break those cultural boundaries so that an artist from Nigeria can be on the same stage with a Playboi Carti and a Lil Yachty."**

**Tell me a bit about your new project, 'Arrested By Love'.** It's a phenomenal body of work and just a real exploration into my world, showing people the different sides to me and a lot of versatility in the music. People feel like Afrobeats should be just one sound but my whole thing is to show people that it's definitely way more than that; you can have your own sound to it and do your own thing. It's definitely very fresh and new so I'm excited, I want to drop it right now.

**It's been eight years since your last solo project too.** Yeah, I've had a few joint EPs and projects but since my last solo ting, it's been seven, eight years; crazy!

**What have you learned the most? Or what's been the biggest change in how you approach a solo project now?** It's been so long, I'm in a completely different space now and the way I work is completely different. I was doing a lot of stuff in between, I had a lot of group projects and started a business; the Native. So it was me evolving as a character to come back on my

solo journey because I was making solo music, I just wasn't putting out the projects. I had a lot of writer's block just making and creating but not putting anything out; I've got to a phase where I'm ready to delve back into that bag. One of the songs on 'Arrested By Love' is actually about four or five years old but that's how much I revisit the music I was making at the time. It still sounds current in 2021, that's the vibe and it's just about creating at the right time; God's timing is everything.

**Do you feel like a lot of your music is timeless?**

I feel like that with a lot of music, so the aim is to always try and make timeless music so it never feels dated. That's the kind of music I listen to, I listen to Sade, I still listen to Maxwell, I was listening to Lenny Kravitz the other day. So I'm one of those people who's really into artists as individuals, I like their stories so that really affects how I listen to the music. I'm really all about that timeless vibe, that's what those people give me, I hope I can give that same kind of vibe.

**How did it feel approaching music since you became a father because the project's about love in general but how did you bring that side of yourself into this new project?**

Yeah, that's really interesting you said that. I feel like becoming a dad just gives you a new perspective on a lot of things. People will say it changes you, it definitely does change you but it just gives me more deliberate actions in everything. I think that definitely spans into the music as well 'cause obviously you don't have time to fuck about anymore, so everything that I'm doing in the studio is deliberate. I know what I'm trying to do, I know what kind of music I'm trying to get out, I know what sound I'm trying to convey. I know what story I'm trying to get across so everything is a bit more deliberate with the approach because I just know what message I want to send across. So when my kid's older and goes back and listens to that shit, he's like, "yeah dad, you're kinda sick! You're kinda wavy!"

**Maybe he's already figuring it out! His mother is also incredible and involved in the music industry, has he been in the studio picking up on the vibe?** [Laughs] He hasn't been to the studio yet but he's definitely listened to 'Arrested By Love' more than anyone, which is kinda fire.





That's his shower hour record so I kinda know the ones he likes the most, versus the ones he doesn't like.

**So tell us what's his favourite song on 'Arrested By Love'?** There's a few, he does like this one I have with Lancey Foux and Backroad Gee that he really goes crazy for. Then there's another one with Deto Black that he really goes crazy for. Those are the two in particular that I

**"Everyone that's on the project, those are my homies outside, they chill with me and my son."**

notice a reaction to every time, I'm like, "bro this is kinda crazy, you're like five months. What do you know?" But he knows something.

**Well I'm a huge fan of Backroad Gee too so he's obviously got great taste. You've also got one of Backroad Gee's best friends, Pa Salieu on the project. Can you tell me about why you picked those collabs?** The reason I picked those collabs was really just organic experiences with my friends in the music industry. A lot of us share the same vision of trying to change how people view African youths around the world.

Like me and Pa, we've connected this year and now that's one of my closest friends because we share a vision of how we see the future of young black people, young Africans in general. That's the energy, I'm not trying to work with people that I don't have a relationship with, I think we've passed that. I'm not trying to search for features that are not organic, everyone that's on that project, those are my homies outside. They chill with me and my son, I go to their family houses, we eat at each other's houses so it's not just a record label, studio ting. These are the people in real life, if you catch me outside those are the people you see me with. It was really wonderful to get the opportunity to work with talented people who I can also call my friends. That's really the case with everyone on this project, from the producers to the artists.

**With Afrobeats, not many people have bought the Rap sound to it as much as Pa Salieu, Backroad Gee and yourself, it's not all singing and melodies. Did you feel that that was an underrepresented side of the sound?** I actually thought it was the other way around, I feel like there's a lot of rapping, people like Pa and Backroad Gee in particular. I find it so interesting, the assumption that because they're black British or they're from wherever they're from, they've probably been through whatever they've been through so they're gonna make one type of music. But those guys are some of the most versatile artists I've ever met. That's kind of been my thing as well, Monday you can hear me on a hard Afro-trap beat but you could also hear me on some African love song vibes. That's the interesting thing about being young and African in 2021, all those sounds are our sounds so we can't box ourselves in. Is it Drill? Is it R&B? Is it Afrobeats? It's everything, it's just who we are so I think like those two guys in particular definitely have a mixture of both sides.

**You have more of a Trap sound to your music, do you feel that?** Definitely to an extent but what it is, it's just where I'm from there's that type of music as well so those Trap drums, you'd be surprised how well they go with Afrobeat melodies. Those are the tools the Internet has provided us to just create and make music. I don't see Atlanta or South Africa, Nigeria or London, it's just the music that I'm creating from the influences I've gathered from all around the world so it's kinda like a mixture of everything.

**With the Diaspora, there's many Nigerian people who are living in Atlanta, maybe first or second generation Americans, so they're still tapping into your sound as well.** Exactly that's it, even going to shows in London there's an audience for everyone and I'm super excited. I did this festival with Playboi Carti, I was one of the opening acts and my new wave Afro sound



Left:  
Jacket: Labrum  
Pants: Prada  
Shoes: Dr Martens

Current:  
Top: Song for the Mute  
Pants: Prada  
Glasses: Gentle Monster x Marine Serre  
Jewellery: Artist's Own









is being accepted in the same audiences where they're hearing Playboi Carti. That's the mission - to blur those lines, to break those cultural boundaries so that an artist from Nigeria can be on the same stage with a Playboi Carti and a Lil Yachty. That wouldn't make sense in 2010 but in 2021 nothing makes more sense than that.

**Plus you've been in the UK on and off for a decade as well right?** Yeah I was here for school from 11 until uni then I was outside for a bit just doing what young brothers do, then I went back and I lived in Nigeria again because I always wanted to go back. The thing with DRB was, I felt like yeah it's cool to live in London and do this Afro thing but for me the most authentic thing was to always go back home. So I only came back to the UK last year to live again; "live," I'm 60/40 between here and there.

**When you first came to the UK, did you feel like you were tapping into a new music scene or were you already aware of a lot of the artists when you're in Lagos?** I was aware but I have a lot of family in the UK so I was coming quite often, my parents went to school here as well, they grew up here for a bit. I have a lot of family so I was here for summers, I spent some time here so I always knew. When 'Boy In The Corner' dropped, I was a young guy from Nigeria and I was like, "wow, what is this?" When Skep was dropping and he was saying he was Nigerian in his music back then, that definitely gave me

## **"That's what I want, more freedom for my people."**

inspiration, like oh there's some other brothers from Nigeria doing their thing. Tinie Tempah as well, I have to give Tinie a big shout out, he was one of the guys who actually put that in the forefront with all his records and he always championed the fact he was from Nigeria. Those are the kind of guys that gave us the vim and the energy to be like, "Yo, if these guys can do it and they're from where we're from, I have that dichotomy of being black British or Nigerian British, why can't we do the same?" Those are the guys that inspired me to really get into it and believe that it was possible.

**You worked with Skepta a couple of years ago, what was it like to connect with him in person and make music?** It was really sick to do that because that was one of my biggest inspirations growing up, from the songs to the style to just being very confident being himself and always representing where he was from at the same time. That was something that stuck with me so that was always my MO, even when I'm in London, I'm in Miami, I'm in LA, I want everyone to know that v is that Naija guy. Working with him

was like meeting one of your idols and making music; he had good energy. He came to Nigeria for a show for our festival NATIVELAND and we connected off that. Seeing the scene that was growing there, he kind of reminisced on how he saw his own Grime scene growing initially, I think he saw the same thing in the Alté scene so that's how me and Boj really connected with him. We did that song in 2018 around the same time he was making 'Bad Energy', so he just did a song with Wizkid and we were the next Nigerian artists to work with him, which was really cool for kids from the Alté scene.

**Has fashion always played a role in your life, when did you first really get into fashion?** Yeah, I definitely got that from my dad. My dad had a clothing store in Nigeria where he used to import Ralph Lauren, Valentino, stuff like that. He's always been a stylish guy, I think Nigerians in general we're just flamboyant and stylish like that. It's definitely something I took interest in, I wouldn't say I was a fashion connoisseur, I didn't study it and go to all the fashion shows but I definitely had a keen interest and I knew my own personal style. I never followed trends, I just knew what I liked and I think that helped me in the long run to develop my personal style from an early age. Who doesn't love fashion, who doesn't love people who dress well?!

**Do you remember one item you got as a kid that made you so happy?** Not really as a kid because we went through phases where there was FUBU and then the Johnny Blaze jerseys phase and the Ralph Lauren phase, shout out to Kanye West! Now it's not like high end stuff, it's a mixture of Nigerian brands now. The people that I grew up with are some of the biggest upcoming designers, like Mowalola, Kenneth Ize, these are guys that we all came up in this Alté Naija scene together and now they're successful artists so seeing them do that is super inspiring. Me, I just go through phases and like what I like.

**What do you reach for when you want to make an impression?** An impression? I'm never trying to make an impression. I just like flowing trousers, I love my wide legged trousers so I think that's been my statement for the last four years. I've always worn extremely wide-leg pants and I think it's that seventies look, just seeing Kravitz and fucking Jimi Hendrix and Andre 3000, how those guys were always challenging the style aesthetic in any generation they were in. That was something that was inspiring to me, I wouldn't say I was trying to copy them but I wanted to channel that in myself and be comfortable in what I liked even though it wasn't on trend and it just kind of worked out. So yeah flowing pants, that's it - anything else could work around it.

**DRB was not just a moment, it's a movement.**



**So how are you seeing the younger generations create their own waves like that?**

It's just exciting, it inspires people to see what's happening right now and seeing all these things come to fruition. So many great artists coming out and saying we inspired them or they viewed us as one of the focal points that gave them a reason to express themselves; it's beautiful to hear and I'm so glad about it.

**You founded Native magazine, why did you decide to do that and how did you incorporate it into everything else you were doing?**

With Native, it was me and my partner, I have partners in Native. We saw there was a void for the promotion and support of African Gen Z and millennials at home and in the diaspora. So it was just like, how do we fill that gap to promote what we know has so much value but not everyone can see? That was always the thing with our whole Alté movement or the music or the fashion, people were always like "yeah, it's cool" but it wasn't mainstream. It wasn't huge, it wasn't for everyone, but we were like "how do we platform that?" Because we have to show people that these people are the guys that could potentially change the narrative of Nigeria or Ghana. That's what we did by making the magazine and we've just seen it grow from strength to strength, obviously there's also the festival aspect of it that gave us the opportunity to bring UK artists from the African diaspora back home to Nigeria for the first time, like J Hus or Maleek Berry or Skepta or Yxng Bane and give them that experience. That cultural exchange to come back home and see that there are people like you back home where you're actually from. It's been growing from strength to strength and it's so amazing to have a platform that really supports young people because we don't have much of that back home.

**Is 'New Government' the new single?** Right now I'm kinda tinkering with my single so what's next is not 100% clear but I have a video for 'New Government' that I shot in Ghana with my friend and close collaborator, Prettyboy D-O. That's another guy who I think has a super clear aesthetic and really good style, we're Nigerian but we're for the world. I think that's what we want to try and get across, we don't want people to box us into this space like "Oh, you're an Afrobeat artist." No, I'm just an artist from Nigeria so that's the mission we're on. You see Wizkid and Tems doing that slowly so that's just the beginning, the window that everyone is gonna jump through and make it a global ting.

**You've said your project was inspired by Nollywood movies, will that show in some of your visuals coming up?**

The process of making the project was peak lockdown so people were spending a lot of free

time on Netflix and shit. I was just watching a lot of archive Nollywood movies because that's what I really enjoy, understanding why that stuff was so important in the 90s and early 2000s. I was seeing how those things were iconic and still making strong references 20, 25 years later and trying to incorporate that aesthetic in subtle ways into the visuals and the style of all the videos and music that I'm putting out. That's why a lot of those films are really love-focused but with extremes of jealousy or rage or comedic love or multiple love interest stuff. Just really interesting aspects of how Africans saw love from that lens and that's kind of what I'm trying to portray with the music. That's how they connected but it's not fully based on Nollywood, that was a strong reference point for me while I was creating and writing music.

**So your visuals aren't going to have any Nollywood dramatics?** No they definitely do, there's one that's specifically inspired by it but it's more subtle, it's not like directly the same but yeah some subtle references for sure.

**How did you come up with the name 'Arrested By Love'? Was it tied into new fatherhood and the relationship you're in? Or you just felt it was a lockdown mood?** Literally everything you said. It was just the perfect title because it was all those things, it was lockdown, it was my relationship, having a son, the movies I was watching. One of the ones in particular that I was most inspired by was a film called Arrested By Love and I kind of thought of the name before I saw the film so it was like a eureka moment like "holy shit, that is so strong!" That's what I was thinking about in the tracks so all those things connected together to make the world make perfect sense for me. When I got the title it made creating the world of the music a lot easier and it made my process pretty seamless. So it was a combination of all those things you said plus building into those movies. Intuition.

**You've dabbled with many different careers so far, but what's left for you to explore outside of music and fashion and events?** I could definitely see myself going into some sort of films, maybe even acting and definitely script writing because I write a lot of short stories and stuff. Maybe a book, children's books or something like that. But just stuff to inspire people, that's what I'm trying to do, inspire and challenge the thought process of people back home just to open their minds a bit more so people can be freer. That's my mission, I want the kids to feel free once they see people like us doing shit that's borderline crazy, they can be like, "I can do this too. I can do better, I can do more." That's what I want, more freedom for my people.









Aged only 22, Diamond White has an incredibly long résumé, having already done what some people take their entire careers to do. Growing up in a musical household, she started acting in theatre at a young age, her talent took her as far as *The X Factor* where she was mentored by Britney Spears. Since then she's voiced characters for *Phineas & Ferb* and the *Emoji Movie*, plus held roles in iconic TV shows like *The Big Bang Theory*, *Black-ish*, *Dear White People*, *Empire* and more.



**After years acting in television and movies, Diamond is returning to her musical roots. Dropping singles periodically since 2015, it wasn't until 2020 that she dropped her first project, 'Tomorrow'. After a long quarantine and teasing fans with singles 'Digitally Yours' and 'OH NO!', she returned with her latest project 'Summerland'. VIPER sat down with Diamond White to discuss the project, going on tour and her flourishing acting career...**

**You've had a long and prosperous acting career, when did you start thinking about music too?** This actually started before the acting! I started off doing musicals so I kind of started both at the same time, but I was singing before.

**Have you always been an artsy kid?** There was never even a point of deciding, "oh, I'm going to be an artist." It just happened.

**Tell me about your latest album, 'Summerland'.** The style of the album is Pop with RnB melodic structures, with a dash of Hyper-Pop added in there. I made it all with my producer named Kylo and he's super into Rock and Country and all those instruments. I'm very much not into those things so we cross-pollinated and came out with this really weird child. It sounds like 'Digitally Yours', but there's also some songs that are completely Hyper-Pop.

**"Phineas and Ferb really is one of the best shows, I would watch it and hear my voice and be like, "Oh mom, I'm on this episode."**

**Do you like to have a hand in the directing of your music videos?** Yeah, I work really closely with my director, his name is Kitaro Cloward. I've been working with him since my first ever video. Only one person has shot every video that I've ever done so I'll go up to him and be like, "I had this crazy ass idea" and he's like, "Oh, wait, I'm going to dream about it, let's talk tomorrow," and then we just keep bouncing shit off each other; That's literally how it goes. This video, I was like, I should have shot the video a long time ago, I don't have a lot of time. I want to do something simple, but also really fucking cool.

Then it just turned into the most complicated shit ever, we ended up blowing out the power in the neighborhood that we were in. We were like, "Let's get a random shot of you ending the video on a roof and then we'll put Saturn in the sky." Next thing you know everything's dark and we couldn't even do it. He's great, he allows me to dream and I like that.

**Yeah, it's important to have a director you work well with. I was a big fan of the way the 'Second Hand' video was shot, that vintage film style. It fits that song very well.** I always wanted to shoot a video that felt very vintage. So with 'Second Hand', I was like, "I just want to do one, see how I feel." But for the next few years ahead we already planned that we're going to do that for the whole thing. This is a bit more like planet-ee. 'Summerland' is a bit more out of body, out of mind, kind of feel. The next thing, I just want to make a sad banger album so that's all I'm going to do now that this album is done.

**Where do you draw your influences from when you're songwriting?** Definitely from life experience and just like my perspective of the world. I don't really like to fabricate too much.

**Whether you're recording in your bedroom or recording in a big studio, is there a certain vibe or a mood you like to put yourself in?** There just needs to be tequila or wine and it's fun.

**Do you plan on going on tour soon?** I want to go on tour, I've been dying to get on stage again, I just want to hang out and party with my fans. I also want to sing and put on a show but I just want to see them and vibe.

**Are you moving from an acting career towards a music career or do you plan on doing both? Not that you have to choose one.** If I could have it my way, I would just be touring 24/7. I'm going to do them both for as long as I can, but I definitely want to do music full time.

**Is there anything that you have learned through your acting and through your world that has helped you in your music career or vice versa?** Well acting has kind of helped me learn how to become a character. So if I wanted to write a character that was about someone from a planet



**SUMMERLAND**

*Pierce*

Summerland

CF





that was musically connected to everything, I could go through all of the characteristics of this person and really make a character, because that's what I have to do for acting. Acting taught me how to play and imagine.

**Do you feel like it's easier for you to express yourself through music than it is through acting?** Oh yeah. Music is my diary. Every single bad thing or good thing that's happened to me, it's been written about and recorded.

**Your music sometimes gives me an old school R&B vibe.** I'm from Motown, so of course I grew up with all that music in my house. I don't think that I pull from these people, but I think that they just inspired me a lot because I listened to them every single, fucking day growing up in my house. So my brother would always play Fantasia, this was right after American Idol. Then my mom put me on to Sade, the smoothness of her voice, the jazziness; It's just the most calming, powerful voice ever. So those are the two that I really remember from growing up but yeah I grew up in a house full of music.

**"If I had known there was a black superhero that looked like me and was around my age, I probably would've been into it."**

**You're voicing the lead in a new Marvel/Disney show, 'Moon Girl and the Dinosaur'. You've had a long career of doing voice overs for cartoons and more, how did you get into it?** It started when I first moved out to LA and I was really poor. My agent was like, you're not really booking anything so do you want to try to do animation because you have a pretty high pitched voice. I was like 10 or 12, so I went for something and it was Phineas and Ferb. I ended up getting it and I started with playing one of the fireside girls, I was the only black fireside girl. From there, I was like, "Shit, I ain't got to get ready, I don't have to look cute, I can just go into the booth and record my voice." So I just kept auditioning and auditioning. This show is really really really cool, like black superhero, the smartest kid in the Marvel Galaxy. Like, come on! I'm so excited, you have no idea! I've been turning into such a

Marvel geek because of this. It's just going to be amazing, it's so cool.

**Were you into Marvel and superheroes before the show?** You see, if I had known there was a black superhero that looked like me and was around my age, I probably would've been into it. Growing up there were just all the men and there was nothing really pulling me towards it. Now that they're implementing people that look like me, I'm here for it 100%.

**What was the experience like voicing a character on the iconic TV show Phineas and Ferb?** Never met them! To this day, I am very confused by Ferb because his voice was so deep. Like hello, who's doing that? Every session I worked with the creators and they were just insane. It really is one of the best shows, I would watch it and then I would hear my voice and be like, "Oh mom, I'm on this episode." I watched Phineas and Ferb before I booked that.

**Do you plan on mixing your two worlds together, like using your own music for soundtracks?** On the show that I'm doing now, The Bold and the Beautiful, they let me sing a few songs that are appropriate for that audience. I sang 'Pretty Brown Skin' for one of the episodes. There is a bit of cross contamination, if I had it my way I would give my family a reality show and have all the music be sourced by me. My family's crazy and also the black Kardashians, I don't know, I'm just fucking around.

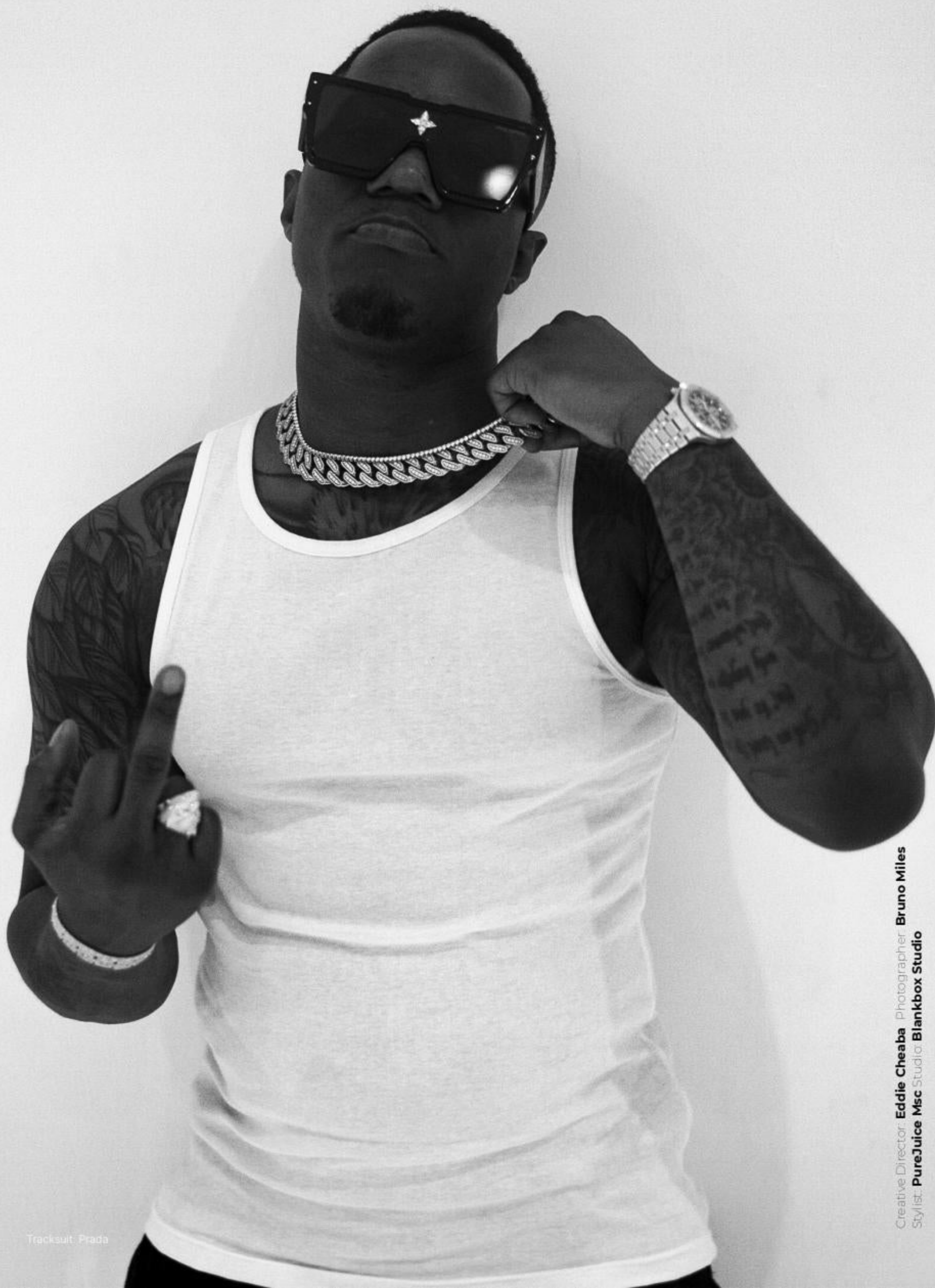
**I was going to ask because you've been doing this for so long, is creating your own show on the cards?** I want to do a show like Paris Hilton, just her in her life going around doing whatever, but I want to make it feel old and TV. So if I do it, I don't think any network would allow me full creativity unless I came in like, "Here's my million dollars, this is what I want to do." If I make something, it's going to be from me; I want it to have a certain feel. That's down the line but I'm definitely thinking about stuff like that.

**With everything going on in your life, what are you most excited for in 2021?** Honestly just because I've been working super-duper hard, I'm finally on hiatus from The Bold and the Beautiful. Personally, I'm looking forward to sleeping for three days straight. The Marvel thing doesn't happen until next year, but I'm just really excited for music and performing.



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# Suspect





**When did you realise that music was your main focus?** This ain't a joke to me no more! You can tell the boy is serious about what he's doing because I'm not just flinging shit out for the sake of it or trying to hop on just anything; I'm still giving you Sus 3.0. So it was a year or two ago, that's when I thought I could do this because to me doing this means being at the top of this shit. It doesn't mean being amongst a bag of man 'cause that's me in any field of anything I do. I want to be at the top of it, I want to be the best at it.

**Where do you fit in the current UK Rap scene?**

Now I can see that I am the source. I've been had the sauce, I've been had everything it takes to make it happen. I see how many styles I've birthed and how much influence I have on the shit. Everywhere I look I see myself, I see bits of me but I'm the original and I didn't get those ideas that everybody else has taken from anybody else. I even have fans that come to me like "Sus, I can't lie that new ting is crazy! Certain times I sit there and I think is Sus doing something new, is it gonna work? And then it's always crazy." Then I realised rah, you lot think that you can dictate how this ting works? You're mad! It's good that you see that and that's great but even if I didn't, it'd still be there. It'd still be the order of the day because that's how it is in anything I do and anything I try to do. Long term I'm flying at it because I'm gonna put my all in anything. That's why it's mad because now I'm seeing that I'm actually applying myself more, so it comes hand in hand. I started to realise that even though at first I was scared to commit to music, now the fact that I've even applied my energy to those things, those things are actually convincing to me now; it's nuts! No one can tell you but if you do it, you see why you should continue doing it.

**'FBG' is one of the biggest UK street Rap classics in history. When you first made it, did you know you had a hit?**

It's one of the national anthems, I'm glad to say that it's big. I love that but it was just fun, I made that shit the same way I made every other song. There was nothing different and there was nothing different after that. I didn't say we need to make more 'FBG's, I used to see people outside and they used to tell me "Yeah Sus we just need another one, we just need another 'FBG'" and I'm like "bro, you telling me how to do my shit?" Bare times I feel like smoking n\*\*\*\*s and if you know yourself and you know you said that to me once, just know you got away lightly because really I proper wanted to kick your arse. More importantly, man's shit is just the vibe and if you're listening, you'll see. Yeah there have been other songs 'FBG'-esque but in different ways. 'FBG' is no hook and I wouldn't say straight bars but it's a

song with no hook. I've made other songs, not just bars but again no hook. So if you listen to the mechanics of the ting, you'll understand that's just my style and I've been carrying on and doing whatever the fuck I want to do and it sounds lit, it sounds litter than everything else so I can't complain; still loading.

**"If you know you said that to me once, just know you got away lightly because really I proper wanted to kick your arse."**

**Is your style of writing more freestyle-based?**

Literally it's the vibe in the studio, a producer running some shit and if I can fuck with it, I can fuck with it. If not it's onto the next beat, it's no big deal, I'm not writing nothing, I don't come there with nothing to say, I don't come there with some mad ting that I've gotta get off my chest. But a beat can inspire an emotion and can make you feel like making the sort of song that you don't have in your catalog. So you're like "what should I say on this? What type of vibe should I give them?" When you start thinking like that and tap into your energy and what is true to you, you start saying anything. Like what's your ting? How could you bring your ting to this incredible production and make it a hit song? I don't want to say I've never written because I'm sure I have in jail or something but I ain't really on the writing thing, it's not for me man. To be fair, if I was on the writing ting, I would probably be taking the shit so serious, it could be super problems for you lot and detrimental to my health. I like my balance man, if it's not broke don't fix it. I'm cooling and that's why I make loads of songs but I don't try to make loads of songs in a day. If it happens, it happens but I'm not trying to do that because this shit is expensive pain, I'm giving them proper stuff; expensive Rap. It's just a vibe man, there's always a vibe whether it's a bad vibe or a good vibe, it's just down to how I'm feeling at the time.

**What is the vibe of the upcoming album?** The album, 'Real Always Wins', I'm super gassed, it's the best shit I ever made. It's mad 'cause I didn't think about it, it was just getting made and





before I knew it, it literally was the crux of what I am: a hit maker. I make bangers and they're all types of bangers but you can always vibe. If you can't relate, you can always pick a vibe from it. Then I look at it and I've got 16 tracks, all super bangers with some of your favourite artists. That's what my ting is about, bringing other people to my world and showing their capabilities in this world. Showing my shit's different but some people are super talented too. Every artist that's ever jumped on a track with me and they've done well, has always got a different respect from me because my shit's unorthodox. Even if I send a track half done, it's big for you to understand what I'm doing with it. I already know we're ready to go because if you understand what I'm doing then that means you're part of my tribe. Therefore, to understand that assignment and execute the assignment is different. Everyone I've done a track with, especially on this album, I've got a newfound respect for.

**You have some incredible friends that you**

**make music with but who is the one that you feel brings out your best side when you work with them?** It's mad because like you say they're my friends but it's not like they were my friends before this shit. The energy is just so pure, that I'm happy to even be able to call some of these people my big brothers now and it's love, it's a bit different. But who brings the best out of me? One of the people bringing the best side out of me is Jesse James. Even coming from the streets, some of my guys never ever understood Jesse's ting because we're from different worlds but we're both from the same ends. He's actually from Walworth Road but two separate worlds, we grew up different. When I

**"We've got bare more bangers ready to go as well so it was just being unpredictable man; keep sidelining and snaking them."**

met him he was still kind of young and he's still been around them man and made some plays but music wise, most of the hood wouldn't get his ting. Some of the shit I've made would not be inspired if it wasn't for him. No cap, on some real shit, so I'll be like "I'm bringing you with me on this ting." Because even if they don't understand it, I do and I know I probably wouldn't have fucking thought of 'One Way' if I weren't at your studio and trying to think of something else. I would probably be in my studio on some gang shit but I was on some "wrong way down the one way." It's not nothing he's said, it's not nothing he's done but it's just me being in that space with normal people. It's nuts because you don't even realise til later on, someone else may find this out when they finally get a job, you start to realise that some people are just normal, they don't think like you. Something happened over there and that person dealt with it way different to how you would have dealt with it but that was





Vest, Sunglasses: Louis Vuitton



T-Shirt: Made By Mensa  
Jacket: Prada (Bottom)  
Denim Jacket (Right): Made By Mensa





calm. But I'll be honest everyone brings out the best of me, I'm inspired. I don't just hit up anyone for a verse but when I have hit anybody up for a verse, I've never missed. Or when somebody has sent me a verse and I've said "nah, not that one" and they've sent me another song and I've done that one, I still ain't missed. Whatever you see come out is literally the best I feel like we could do, I'll still be myself, apply myself and give my very best. I'm always inspired, everyone brings the best out of me. From when they understand where I'm coming from, that's inspiring to me. If someone jumps on my ting and fucks it up, they prove to me I'm not crazy for hitting them up. Because I always know I'm right, like "this guy's gonna fuck it up." Then he does and then I'm like, "I'm not crazy you know, I'm mad smart man, I'm like Einstein you know."

**"The album is the  
best shit I ever  
made, I can't even  
lie."**

But everyone inspires me, everyone you see me with, they bring out the best of me and more importantly, they give meaning to this thing that I'm doing because I'm doing nothing that's never been done before. Literally I'm doing some shit that has never been done before, trying to make it with a sound that's never been done before; beats that aren't popular. I can't say it's not been done before in America because that's where it started, but beats that aren't popular here and beats that resonate to a time when I was growing up, when my big brothers and my big family members were running gangster shit. For me they give meaning to what I'm doing, they're taking their time to put into my thing. Big people as well, not just big in music, you can't get access to some of these n\*\*\*\*s for nothing. There's nothing you can tell them and they're pumping energy in my shit, I'm riding with them. First and foremost I will never forget that and secondly, it gives meaning to what I'm doing and drives me even more. I don't even waste my links, I won't be here every minute trying to bug people just because they showed me love before. I never look at my ting and think



someone's missing anyway so that's the way it works organically; if that person is meant to be on it, it'll work.

**The recent collaboration with Potter Payper was a nice surprise!** Love that and if a supporter like yourself didn't expect that then I'm doing my job because this ting ain't about fucking being predictable or seeing that happen. Large up to Potter as well, the song's a banger but he didn't need to make it his lead single, bare of his industry buddies must have been mad at him, like "I'm signed too, let's work!" He did the real ting hence me recognising all them moves, I'm 100% gonna run behind him and 100% gonna support whatever because man's actually there. We've got bare more bangers ready to go as well so it was just being unpredictable man; keep sidelining and snaking them. That's just what it is and the album is the best shit I ever made, I can't even lie. Anyone I played it to automatically fucks with it, I don't think I've had one bad review. It's mad and it's not Sus, it's not what you think it's going to be. Well some of it is what you think it's gonna be but the crux of it and the beginning of it is to show you, I tell you how this shit moves. I'm super gassed, Viper a whole lot of gang shit, you get me?



66

Paloma Ford





**She blew us away with the 'X Tapes' EP, Paloma Ford shows no signs of slowing down with a part two on the way. In addition to music, she's launched her own fashion range 'The Westside Collection' with the campaign shot by LA photography legend Estevan Oriol. VIPER spoke to the Long Beach singer about working with Rick Ross on 'All For Nothing' and her essentials for a studio session.**

**What's the status of 'X Tapes II', are you still recording the project?** 'X Tapes II' is in a labor of love right now since I'm still recording. I decided to go back in the studio to put some final touches in. It'll all be worth the wait, I can't wait to share the new stuff.

**I read that it tells the story after the heartbreak you shared on the first EP, can you explain more?** I wanted to talk about the journey we go through as women getting back to "ourselves." The moments of insecurity and regrets as well as getting your confidence and sensuality back.

**There were four years between your debut EP, 'Nearly Civilized' and 'X Tapes'. Why did 2020 feel like the right time to drop your second project?** I finally felt like I had the story right. Your art shouldn't be something that's rushed because once it's out there in the world, it's there forever. During that time, I never stopped recording.

**What was it like to release during the pandemic?** I felt contrasting feelings releasing music amid a world crisis. On the one hand, you have the opportunity to bring healing to people during such crazy times. On the other hand, in some aspects it felt uncomfortable promoting myself at a time when things were so crazy.

**Your music is that sultry and smooth style of R&B; does it help when you're in a home-body state of mind?** I am a home-body, so I suppose so.

**What's your setup for recording?** I have a very relaxed home studio that's mobile. Home sessions are the best.

**What's in your purse when recording and what are your studio essentials?** Essentials for the studio include but aren't limited to: my lipgloss, perfume, honey, incense, candles and sage to clear space. I eat a lot of fruit and drink a lot of water and tea. I love some candy - rips licorice are my fav - and I gotta have something nice to roll up.

**Were there any songs that you almost didn't want to release because they felt so personal?** I think my style of writing leaves enough room for a little mystery, so no. Plus, these are my songs, my story, so I don't mind how it's interpreted.

**You released a video for your song 'All For Nothing' with Rick Ross. What was the highlight of shooting the visual?** The highlight of the 'All For Nothing' video was definitely the river scene. It was just something magical about how that scene came together. So many things could've gone wrong, but it worked out even better than we all hoped for.

**"You can't mention Los Angeles without acknowledging the West Coast Legend, Estevan Oriol and his art."**

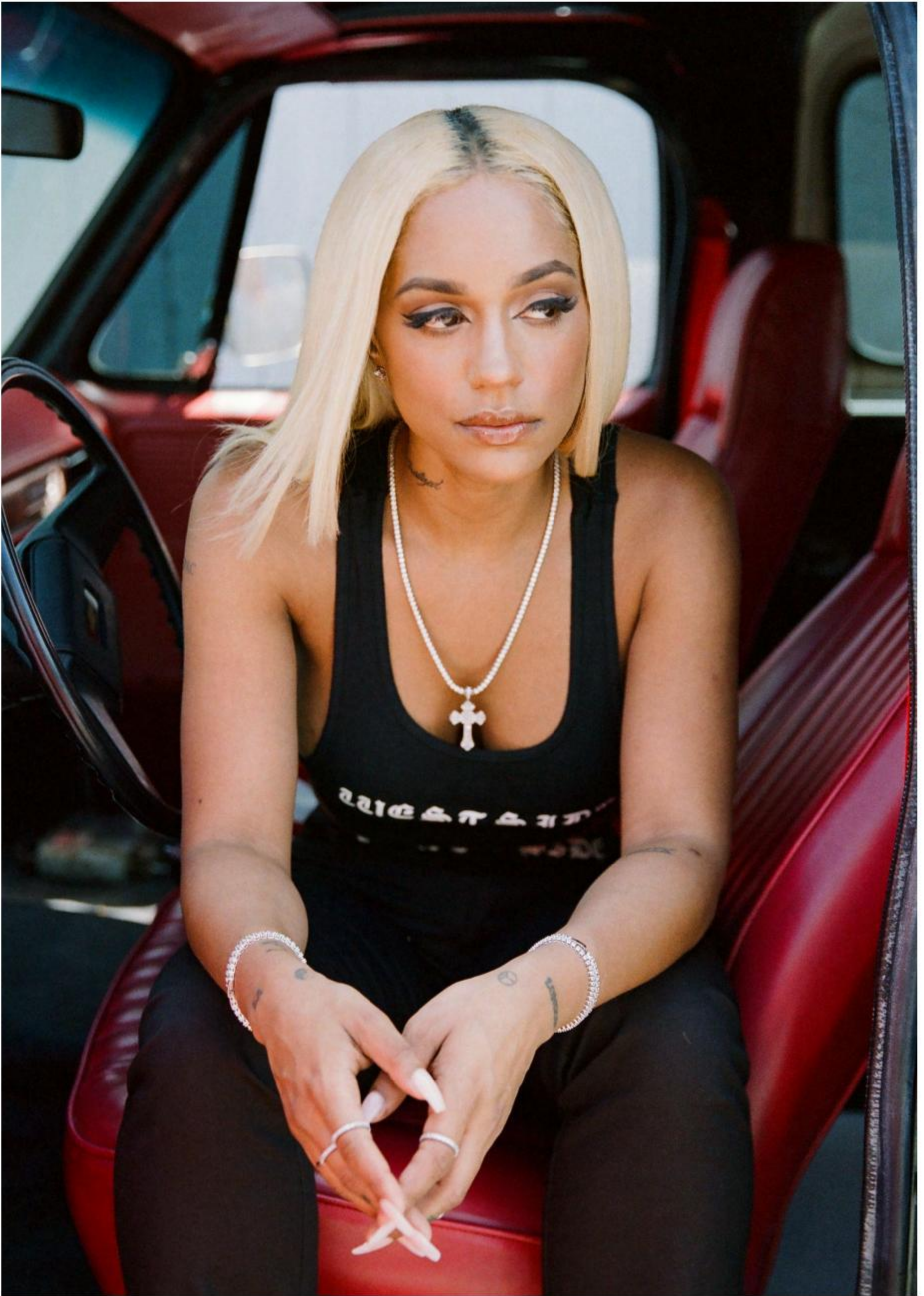
**You mentioned that he was the only artist you could hear on this. What is it about Ross' sound that you feel compliments yours so well?** Ross has an ear and a voice for soulful music. I always wanted to work with him, but I knew it had to be the right record. 'All For Nothing' was just that.

**I bet you're still yet to perform some tracks from the EP, what are you most excited to sing live?** I'm definitely excited to perform 'All For Nothing' as well as 'Nights I Cry' off of 'X Tapes'.

**'X Tapes II' marks an end to the 'X Tapes' EP era, what do you have planned next?** 'XTapes II' will show evolution. The music, visuals as well as merchandise I'm working on will coincide with the project.

**The photos for the collection were shot with iconic LA photographer Estevan Oriol. What was the experience like working with him?** You can't mention Los Angeles without acknowledging the West Coast Legend, Estevan Oriol and his art. He has captured some of the most renowned photos across music and fashion while highlighting LA culture. We've wanted to work together for some time now, but I knew the moment had to be special. Working with him was perfect. I thank him so much for helping me bring this project to life.













**“Fashion has always gone hand in hand with music for me. It channels another form of expression and extends from the music I make.”**

**Tell me about your new fashion collection ‘Westside’ and the process of launching it?** ‘The Westside Collection’ is a capsule I collaborated with Merch God on, naming it after my record ‘Heartbreak on the Westside’. The pieces we chose reflect the beauty, uniqueness and DNA of Los Angeles.

**Coming from a successful music career, what was it like to transition into fashion?** Fashion has always gone hand in hand with music for me. It channels another form of expression and extends from the music I make. Once you hear the music, next comes the visuals and that’s how you really get the chance to showcase the entire package. That said, I never felt like I had to transition into something. It’s just exercising a different form of my art to me.







*Words by Lily Mercer*

*Photos by Eddie Cheaba*





Creative Director & Photographer: Eddie Cheaba  
Photography Assistant : Bruno Miles  
Stylist: Nadya Maki Styling Assistant: Thai



**With one of the most quoted lyrics in UK rap in 2021, ArrDee has cemented himself firmly in the scene. While the 'Body [Remix]' was the introduction for many music lovers, he's been buzzing since his 'Cheeky Bars' freestyle, which gained the attention of many industry gatekeepers. As one of our Winter cover stars, he talks to VIPER about manifestation, repping for the geezers and his fortuitous meeting with Tion Wayne.**

**I saw you jumping out of a helicopter, are you sure you're not too famous for this interview?**

Listen that had nothing to do with me, chat to Charlie [Sloth]. Charlie is the boy, I had Charlie's set in wireless and then Charlie's set at Parklife.

**You did your first performance at Wireless this year but you said you used to try to break in, were you ever successful?** We used to try, never [made it into] Wireless. A couple Brighton festivals, I'm not gonna put names because it might not be a good look but yeah definitely not Wireless, they're a bit more on point round there. I saw some TikTok boys do the most though, putting high-vis jackets on and helping out with the police then creeping in bit by bit; it went viral. Yeah, we did not think that smart.

**Talk me through your start in professional performances getting into your rap career.** My first booking wasn't a booking, someone asked me if I wanted to do it and I said yeah because it was a good opportunity to get a couple things off the checklist, my first performance as ArrDee after 'Cheeky Bars' was in Ibiza. I didn't have one club performance in the UK, not a uni or anything; my first club performance was out in Ibiza Rocks. I did open mic nights in Brighton and things like that but my first professional one was Ibiza Rocks.

**When did you first realise you had bars, were you freestyling in school?**

= Basically there's this park in Brighton called Saunders park and there was something called Audio Active, it's like a youth centre and they set up a thing called Big DJ Day. I was eight years old, I was young. I was doing guitar lessons at the time because I've always loved music, it's always been in my family and they had DJ decks and a mic set up and you rapped into the mic and they put it on a CD. I wanted to do a rap, they said, "what do you like doing?" I said "I like to play guitar," so they said "rap about that." I think the bar's something like, "I could play a guitar on a giraffe, in the bath." I used to rap to myself in the shower, in an American accent obviously, because these times I hadn't tuned into UK rap. Then in year six 'German Whip' came out and I tuned in, then Skepta 'That's Not Me'

came out when I was in year seven. I listened to all of them, went back and watched all the Lord Of The Mics and fell in love with clashing. Obviously Don't Flop started in Brighton so I already knew what that was. We started doing clashes with the boys in the music rooms at school when we had music lessons. Then it got to the point I had to be the middleman, the referee, because nobody wanted to do it with me anymore because it wasn't fair. Nobody was on par with me, they couldn't par me. So I wrote something and ordered a USB microphone off Amazon, I think it was £40, loaded up Audacity and put it online with just a red thumbnail on YouTube, I think I was 11 years old. All the olders at school slated me and called it shit, all the girls my age thought it was sick 'cause I'd actually recorded music and put it online and it was mind-blowing to everyone. From there I just kept it pushing, my thing was I never looked at it like I can't be a rapper because I'm not a rapper. Even from a young age Jay Z wasn't always Jay Z or Eminem wasn't always Eminem so if they can do it why can't I?

**"I'm very Marmite though, people either really love me or really despise me."**

**Being from Brighton is a bit of a road block, as is being a white rapper, how did you navigate those things?** I didn't take them into account, talent speaks louder than all of that and so does hard work so if I work my arse off and I've got the talent to back it up, it's not even something that came into my mind - like "I might not make it because I'm from Brighton." I always talk about manifesting, the universe doesn't understand the language of "I don't want this to happen" or "I do want this to happen" so you have to be very careful with things in speaking things into











reality, because positive things always speak louder than negative but you can always speak negative things into reality. So it's not something I've thought about to be honest.

**Rizzle Kicks were the last rappers from Brighton to pop off...** [Raps] Get down with it, down with it [Laughs].

**How did you feel inspired when there was a lack of big artists from your hometown?** If anything it just made it more big for me. I like challenges so when someone tells me not to do something or I can't do it, there is a 99.9% chance I'm gonna at least attempt to do what you've just told me I can't or that I should or whatever. So yeah, it was just like, "okay, now I've got a task to put myself on and I've got to put my town on and that leaves a bigger legacy for me." I'm a massive attention seeker so it just makes it bigger and better for me. Because it means I've achieved more than, say, a white rapper from a popular estate, in terms of rap, in London.

**"This six foot five guy is just giggling, then he's like 'what ArrDee yeah?' So I'm thinking 'rah this is my first time being recognised in London'. So I'm like, 'who's that?' He's taken the bally off and it's fucking Tion Wayne"**

**Geezer culture is so British but yet that's not really been represented in UK rap much and I feel like you filled that lane.** It's accounted for, it's understandable because it's difficult. It's a fine line between still being musical and lyrically talented. I grew up listening to a lot of Eminem and when you listen to Eminem's old stuff, he was very comical, but still very lyrically gifted. I think there's a fine line before you end up being a parody rap kinda person. So with the geezers we're all kinda like rowdy down the pub but if you go too far down that it becomes less rap or more of a joke. But my thing was, I'm always going to be me. I never used to jump on Drill beats because everybody's talking about stabbing. Obviously you rap what you live and people come from that and if that's their way of getting out of that place then I absolutely think it's a great opportunity for people that are coming



from these kinds of areas. For me, Brighton's a party town, people don't sleep. All we know how to do is party so that was what I lived. Before becoming my manager, my manager said why don't I jump on a Drill beat but still be me and it worked from there. I've always been myself on tracks, it just ended up being this kind of sound that ended up running.

**Have a lot of people reached out feeling like maybe there wasn't someone whose music they related to as much until they heard you?** Yeah, I think my fanbase is very diehard. I'm very Marmite though, people either really love me or really despise me. Too many people are like, "yeah, ArrDee's alright." As in he's either shit or he's sick. There's two sentences mainly that are said about me and it's such a one word difference but they're polar opposites. Either, "this kid is fucking lit" or "this kid thinks he's fucking lit." There's such a contrast between those sentences by just putting one word in but I've got a fanbase that not only love my music but love me. Even some that come to the show, I don't know whether it's a good or a bad thing but sometimes I feel like they might just come to see me. Obviously they like the music as well but they actually just want to see me rather than really wanting to come and sing along to the music. 'Cause we live in a generation where, especially at raves, festivals, clubs, where we've all come out of lock down and Snapchat memories exist, no one's got any memories that they've had for the last two years. People



for the majority of the time are filming as well but yeah my fanbase definitely grew out of it. That kind of catapulted it because there was nobody covering that kind of culture and that's a massive part of the UK population.

## **"Anytime I post a picture of my glasses, everybody says it looks like Harry Potter and Aitch had a baby."**

**The industry plant comments obviously circle a lot of people. Do you feel like people just discovered what that term means when they use it on you?** It got said a few times and we live in a social media sheep era. So with it being said a few times, there are actually physically no industry plants in the UK unless you're talking about like what Simon Cowell and them man do where they throw £10 million at them and if it don't work, fuck it! That's just basically petrol money so it doesn't matter. But UK Rap wise, obviously the industry is big and it's growing. We're at a time where UK artists are finally starting to make proper money and have a real level of success where we can fully get to America now. In America, Lil Pump for example, his uncle might work at some label in America and straight away he can put you out there with a million views on Worldstar, it's nothing; that's an industry plant. The UK, especially in the Rap scene, you have to be accepted before it bangs, no matter how much money they pump into you. I know a bag of artists that have been signed and had a load of money pumped into them through marketing and everything and the tune didn't connect so it doesn't connect and that's it. Even with my first original freestyles, 'Cheeky Bars' and '6am in Brighton', even though I was always rapping in Brighton and everybody knew who I was in terms of rapping around here, London had to accept me first and foremost before I could do anything. All the meme pages I'm Just Bait, Young Kings, Urban TV, they all had to show me love and for that to get a good response before labels or anything even came anywhere near me. I don't believe there is one industry plant in the UK, Rap wise anyway.

**I agree with you, a lot of people just think the UK has bad vibes, do you often see that what it takes for people to jump on you is a co sign?**

My manager will punch me in the face if I answer this question. Obviously, I absolutely love my country's vibes and the whole British culture, banter, going to the pub, Geezers, Inbetweeners, all of them things. That is me to a tea, wake up in the morning, a cup of tea, two sugars, all of that. But in terms of social media, we're a very sarcastic community, British people. So sometimes people say things online, I see everyone says, "the UK is bad vibes" and to an extent in comments that is true, the UK is bad vibes. Like, I'll get my mum a car but because it wasn't a Lamborghini Urus, I'm a dickhead and I shouldn't have bought her the car. Or I get my mum a house but because it's not number one Park Lane in Mayfair, I might as well have just not bought the fucking house, whereas in America it's a bit different. But sometimes people say things online that are either sarcastic and meant to be seen as a joke, or they actually don't even think that opinion. They're just trying to build their page and know which comments get likes and interaction. The way Instagram algorithms work is kind of dumb because they've changed them a million times so everybody's trying to get in on it. I just keep myself in one lane, I've got a clean heart and a good soul. I feel like the clean hearted always win so when anyone has hate for me I just kind of laugh at it. Some of them are actually funny as well, I'm not gonna lie, people come up with some funny comments.

**What's been the funniest criticism about you or your music that you've seen?** Anytime I post a picture of my glasses or a video of my glasses, everybody says it looks like Harry Potter and Aitch had a baby.

**[Laughs] Sorry I haven't seen you in glasses.** I'm supposed to wear them, I didn't want to wear them in year seven because I was too cool for school and all of that stupid stuff. Now my eyesight's even worse, I basically just break them or lose them all the time, I'd lose in my head if it wasn't screwed onto my shoulders.

**There's two sides to your music in my opinion, you have a turn up style but you can get introspective too.** My management team calls me Jekyll and Hyde because when I'm partying there's always two sides to me, it all depends on what I'm drinking or whatever, that's one thing. But I've got multiple sides to my personality and there is more substance to me. The majority of the time I'm more happy, energetic, easy going,









**“I’ll get my mum a car but because it wasn’t a Lamborghini Urus, I’m a dickhead and I shouldn’t have bought her the car. Or I get my mum a house, but because it’s not number one Park Lane in Mayfair, I might as well have just not bought the fucking house”**



lit, good vibes, everybody wants to party with me - I know how to have a good time. Call my phone and you're gonna love your night, you're gonna hate your morning kind of thing. But music for me originally was always about venting and being intimate because I don't like to openly speak about things, not that other people shouldn't but that was my way of venting and talking about it. That was how I made music for ages and then when the Drill came, he wasn't my manager at the time but I met my manager and he's like, "you do all this deep rap stuff but I don't even know that side of you. The main side of you is that lit guy that's always turning up, bouncing around, like owning the room kind of thing. Why don't you rap from that side?" I was like, "oh but I like to be intimate with the little fan base I've got." Then we talked about growing and that and just enjoying myself and enjoying life. Because I'm young, as much as I do have wisdom beyond my age or whatever you want to call it, nobody wants to be lectured by a little 18 year old from Brighton that hasn't really physically seen life yet. No matter what I've been through or seen, to them I'm an 18 year old white kid from a suburban town. That's always been the two sides to me, I think the further I get in my career the more I'll explore that. Obviously I blew up on TikTok as well so a lot of my fanbase is under 18. Lyricism isn't as widely accepted, one in that fan base, and two in the UK in general to be fair. In America you can explore different kinds of beats and you can be mad, wild, crazy out there, you can dye your hair rainbow colours and grills rainbow colours and do crazy things or paint your face. In the UK, where the scene's a bit small we really are not subject to change. We don't like it too much, we like things how we have them and that's it. With leeway obviously because I am different, walk a certain way, talk a certain way, act a certain way, look a certain way, so as much as I can still be myself you don't see me wearing no buss down chain and doing what rappers do and all that kind of thing. We're all normal people, we all shit, piss and bleed kind of thing. But you also have to maintain what the scene accommodates to because it's not massive. If you're in it you know how small the UK industry, in terms of rap music actually is.

**How do you compromise, releasing music you love without changing your sound?** Because I still love my lit music as well, it depends what mood I'm in. I'm always writing so it depends what I'm doing. Right now, I call it touring because I'm basically doing five shows a week, every week. It's universities, clubs, universities, clubs. It's not an official tour because it's not touring, but where that's what I'm doing my life right now, I always rap what I'm living. It's always based on the story if you actually listen to my

music properly, it's like I'm talking to someone for the whole time. So for Cheeky Bars, my first ever freestyle, it's like "remember when ArrDee couldn't stay." It's like I'm talking to them, like "she wanted to stay, I don't\*\*\*\*". Someone said to me, all of my songs you could take them in as if it's like I'm rapping the song to a girl and I'm trying to draw her, I'm trying to take her home. Every so often I throw the girl stuff in there and obviously a man when he's trying to draw a girl, he'll be a bit flirty and talk to them about girl stuff and whatever. Then bring the conversation back and talk about some more deep meaningful stuff, still keep it light hearted and come back into the lit stuff. So I can't remember who broke that down to me, but in all of my songs, it's like I'm always rapping to a girl and I'm trying to bring her back and I'm telling her my story of what I've done. That's how I write all my stuff, I write stories or I use it as venting. It's easy for me, I'm always writing music that I enjoy anyway so I don't think there is a compromise in that sense.

**Do you ever sit on something though? Do you have any songs that you think "this is great, but it's not the time" that you're just waiting to release one day?** Hundreds literally. In my notes I have 604 separate documents. And I'd say at least 90% of them are full songs

**You're still in your teens. What's your long term goal with music?** Obviously to be very successful. I always use the term "world domination" but that's always got dark things attached to it. I don't mean it like that obviously, but yeah conquer the UK as strategically and quickly as possible. Cover that then obviously we'll branch out and do the Europe things, America is a big one. I want to be one of the first, I know there'll be a few in my personal opinion. If I had to put my money down, I think Deno will be the first. Obviously a few people have gone there and done that well, Deno, DBE, and a couple like that I think could do it as well. But the main goal is... have you seen DMX at his Woodstock show? Or like Freddy Mercury's Live Aid? You know the way it's just like wow, I want to do a show in Japan where nobody can even speak the language that I'm speaking, but my energy is that lit and I've got that much captivation and stage presence that everybody is just still going mad, losing their minds. Like Michael Jackson, I'm going to stand on the stage and see people faint, that's what I want.

**TikTok made everything global, you actually can unlock so many doors quite easily. So that doesn't sound so unrealistic.** It's all achievable. I believe it all that's why I'm never worried, because manifestation is a massive part of my day to day life in everything, not just music.



So there's never ever a doubt in my mind of exactly what I want, with manifestation you're not supposed to manifest how you're going to get it, you can't really do the journey. It's more like you have one vision stuck in your mind and you're constantly manifesting, almost like you already lived it. You speak it into existence and that's exactly how I ended up here. I believe 100% how I ended up coming across the tune 'Oliver Twist' and the Tion song, how I even got into being in contact with Tion is completely written. Six years from now when I write my book everybody's gonna think I'm chatting shit like it's fictional but it's not.

**How did you meet?** 'Cheeky Bars' came out and he liked it, commented on it on Mixtape Madness, DM'd me and just put "cold." Then '6am' came out he sent a voice note he was like, "all right then yeah, you're going in, I wanna see more." These times I'd signed my first deal, for just two singles because obviously I'm new, I'm young. It's a completely different market, high risk in a sense of it's different but low risk in the sense of, where I'm from Brighton, you're not gonna have me caught up in any scandals or whatever. I'm not going to jail anytime soon or anything like that. But then I had to stay in London in this apartment because I had studio the next day. It was in Fitzrovia, I had some girls around with some bottles and we were trying to have a little party. I'm coming back into the apartment and two G wagons have pulled up, some other blacked out cars, bare people with ballies on. I've got my Gucci bag on, I've just got my first ever bit of money, just come off being flat on my arse broke, like bumping the train to go to the studio. So I bought myself some things and these times I'm thinking 'fuck - I don't even know London like that, I don't know where I am'. Obviously west is a nice part of London but I don't know where I am and it's late, it's like one in the morning. So they all come over and they're trying to get into the building. I'm like, "do you want me to give you the code so you can get in" because I was just trying to get the fuck back into my apartment as quick as possible and this six foot five guy is just giggling. Then he's like "what ArrDee yeah?" So I'm thinking rah this is my first time being recognised in London, who the fuck's that? So I'm like, "who's that?" He's taken the bally off and it's fucking Tion Wayne. It's his bredrin's birthday and he's got an apartment in the same complex, like an apart-hotel kind of thing. So we've gone up, I've met his lot, he's got some girls in there they're all partying, getting lit. I think Tion had the original 'Body' song, it wasn't out yet but he already knew he's going to do a remix. It was either out or just about to come out and he was showing me it. He was saying "we're gonna do a remix, you feel like you can do a verse for that? Are you ready?" He gave me a lot of advice, Tion's

got the best advice ever! I always talk about different advice that artists have given me, but whenever interviewers ask me anything that Tion gave I always say no, there's no way I'm even bussing them gems out, no one needs to know them. But yeah then the song came out and they announced that they're going to do a remix, like industry rumour not publicly and he hit everyone up at the same time. Straight away within 24 hours I'd written seven verses, and went down on the beach. I like to go to the beach because there's a few things I believe in, I believe in star signs for one, so either love me or hate me for that. But obviously we're 80% water and the moon controls the sea so I find myself very at ease or peaceful down at Brighton seafront at nighttime. But either way, I'm down the beach with my bredrins spitting verses and I think the fourth one "have you seen the state of her body, if I beat it I ain't wearing a Johnny," they were like, that's the first line. "Adeola wanna roll with a geezer," that second line there, that is the first line from the second verse I wrote and then "you can do what you like darling, I don't give an F," from there, I think that was the last verse I wrote. Then the really fast bit, "yo, Tizzy, my killy," I wrote that in the studio.

**"I gotta show  
people I can still  
write all these  
hooks that are  
catchy and  
bangers but also  
make songs of  
substance."**

**I've seen people across the world including very famous people saying those bars, which one was the most surreal to see?** Jason Derulo, Mia Khalifa, fucking Russ, the American Russ, Kid Laroi. There's a bag of people that did it and where it all moves so fast, I really did nothing with my life in terms of money. These times I'm still living with my mum upstairs in the loft room in not the greatest area of where I'm from, playing Call of Duty with my bredrin and smoking cigarettes. So all of this is going off and I've got all this buzz, I don't know what to do with myself kind of thing, we can't perform, it's still fucking lockdown; it was mad but it was very surreal.











**You brought your mum out on stage at Wireless on her birthday and you got her the mini, how does she feel watching your career take off?**

She loves it! My mum is into witchcraft; again everybody's gonna have bad connotations of what I actually mean but it's actually not anything negative or evil energy, it's just different stones and things like that. So I have this black ring, it's Obsidian and black Sapphire which is meant to be grounding because of the sign I have. All of this I learned from my mum and my sister. One time I was in the crowd at Reading and I had a mask on because I was watching Post Malone. The word went round it was me and some kid was like, "well that ain't ArrDee. If you're ArrDee put your hand up" so I put hand up, the kid's fucking lost his mind because he's like, "nah he's got the black ring on, it's actually him bruv, he's got his black ring on!" So all of this stuff about manifesting, like even reading *The Secret*, that's my mum's book. So I learned it all from her anyway, she's very into that. My mum brought me up along with my brother, she always believed in me, if anything more than I did at first when I was like a young teenager. Because you know when you're a teenager like "fuck off mum" and all that stuff and "I ain't reading no books whatever I'm a bad boy, I'm gonna jump the gate and go smoke weed with my mates, that's what I'm gonna do." But as I got older and I got more comfortable in my skin and reading into it. She believes so she's obviously over the moon but also not losing her mind. She's like "yeah, you deserve it all" she's seen me working my arse off and saving every little bit of money I had from when I was 12 years old going to work in the studio. I've actually permanently got tinnitus because I was in the studio so young with the speakers so loud for so many hours working my arse off. Obviously I had little ear drums and I'm only 5'6" now and I'm 19.

**Tell me about your project, is it coming in the new year?** Early January, it's a mixtape of quite a few songs. It's basically me and all angles of me as my introductory tape. It's my first project, I gotta show people I can do a project, show people I can still write all these hooks that are catchy and bangers but also make songs of substance. How I was saying to you about how I write songs, it's like I'm talking to someone and introducing myself to a new girl for every track, it's like that. So each song you get to learn a bit more about me, it's gonna make the fanbase that love me, love even more and the fanbase that hate me and call me shit be like "fuck, what do we say about this one?" Because any argument we've got, you press the next song and be like, "yeah he can do this but he ain't done that." Then on the next tune I've done that, so you've got to come up with something else, then something else and then something else.

**How did you select the songs for the mixtape?** They're constantly getting changed right now,

that's part of the reason why it's not out yet. To start with we had 27 songs that were solid solid songs that were all singles and bangers so we picked the bangers from them. Then we added like 14 songs now with a lot of substance and maybe wouldn't chart so well but lyrically and over time songs that will last. Obviously I'm always working, I basically live in the studio so sometimes we replace songs that might have similar concepts but bang better or have more lyrical ability. There isn't really a formula to that one, it's just more the vibe and you can't always overthink it, there's always another project you don't want to take away. Otherwise I could replace the whole project 10 times over. Obviously it's not as easy to just say "I've got the tape now, let's put it out guys." I'm constantly growing and at the rate that I do grow, I'm more mature than other people my age. Also I mature at a rapid rate which I think really comes down to the fact my older brother's got autism. So even though he's 21 I kinda feel like the older brother, he'll disagree but yeah I was always far more grown up than what I was. But I'm constantly growing so the music will always change with me.

**"No matter what I've been through or seen, to them I'm an 18 year old white kid from a suburban town."**

**What's changed about the production or the beats that have come your way? Have you been working with producers more or have you been sent a higher caliber of beats?** I've got the winning sound team-wise, in terms of producers. We went to the studio in Bath, it's the biggest studio in the UK. It's like a residential studio, it's got an apartment built into it. Building beats around my bars it's crazy. I used to only ever write at home so it's all new to me. But it's all very, very sick.







**As the go to jeweller for London's elite rappers and athletes, A Jewellers has built a brand specialising in custom pendants and watches. From his exclusive Hatton Garden boutique, the founder Abtin tells VIPER about his experience rising up the ranks through diamond dealing and how he established his own business.**

**Is there a favourite piece that really felt like a transitional point for you? Maybe when you made it you felt you were entering a different league as a jeweller?** The pieces we did in the beginning, they got our name out there a little bit but they weren't pieces that shaped the UK custom jewellery game. There were other jewellers making custom stuff and it wasn't as good as their best pieces but then after some years I kept creating and then we started making stuff that was better than what everyone else made. I made a piece for Young Adz with the goat head and 29 and then the ring we did for him. Then the AJ Tracey pieces, then the K-Trap piece; this is five plus years ago. The first custom piece I made was for a friend of mine - his rap name is H Moneda - the first piece I made for him was his Mache Money two M's on an emblem. That's the first piece I made for anyone, not just a rapper. That's the first custom piece I made, he put his trust in me and let me make the piece for him. I have to respect him and always thank him for that. Some other people after that let me make some pieces for them and they trusted my work, like Krept. So then it got to a point where people like AJ Tracey were reaching out to us, wanting us to make their pieces. That's when you start realising this is about me knowing and meeting people and talking them into wanting to do something with me. I've always been good with my tongue and I've always been good at negotiating, convincing, getting people to trust me and work with me, which hasn't necessarily been a lie or con, it's always me speaking the truth. I knew that I could provide a good product for them but just meeting people and talking to them was also what I was good at. For people like AJ Tracey to reach out to us and want us to make their piece rather than another jeweller, who at the time was very known and established for 10 years, 15 years, 20 years and had their shops for 20 years. They started reaching out to us, at that point when you're in a small, dingy office, you're young, you're not a proper established company with structure, you're a wheeler dealer, cowboy jeweller in a small office trying to make a living. Although your stuff is very good and you're good at what you do, you're still at a low level, you're not a proper company. So for him to want to reach out to me at that point and want me to make his jewellery for him rather than him reaching out to X&Y who have had their shop and been established in their company for 20 years, at that point you start realising that you're making noise now and you're someone that's becoming a leader of the jewellery business and

the custom diamond business in this country. It was at that point so many other customers were coming to you, everyone contacting you on Instagram or coming into your store and buying things. Although you've got only 5 or 10 watches on the table and a few chains and wherever, they still want to come to you and deal with you. You start building from there and buying and selling, building your stock and you're in a small office where no one can walk by and find you; they're contacting you from Instagram just to specifically see you. They're

**"It's an incredible feeling when you're in the club and then your song comes on and A Jewellers is mentioned in the song"**

buying and you're starting to do more business than all these shops downstairs and all over the UK, who've been there for 20 years. You're doing so many sales, you're realising "wow I'm actually becoming a well known, established name for jewellery." That's when it starts becoming a turning point and you start understanding and realising that there's no limit to this and there's no stopping. You can literally achieve anything you want to achieve, you can go as far as you want to go and if you manifest in your mind and you believe in it, it can truly come true. That's the secret, when you start understanding that and you start believing it's reality then it does become reality.

**It seems like every rapper in London has given you a shout out, how does it feel when you hear that for the first time? What's your favourite shout out you've received?** It's an incredible feeling especially when you're in the club, you're partying and then your song comes on and A Jewellers is mentioned in the song! So D-Block Europe - Young Adz and LB - made a song with Krept and Konan and Deno, it's called 'Self Obsessed' and that was the first song. To not just be mentioned in one of the verses



but this was actually in the chorus, the whole hook had A Jewellers. It was like "Should've went A Jewellers, get your diamonds pure." It was a catchy song, everyone was singing it! So many people love this song and didn't even know A Jewellers and then they started seeing A Jewellers and everyone started tagging me. Then it comes on in a club; I'll be there in Sumosan to this day and they start playing the song upstairs. It's an actual song that was in the charts, it's a sick song and to be in a chorus was amazing. We've been mentioned by many other

## **"At the time no one was dealing in watches or diamonds or jewellery at my age"**

rappers that are now friends to me, I consider them my friends like AJ Tracey and other people. They've always shown us love, they've always mentioned us so it's a great feeling, Fredo has mentioned us. It's a great feeling that we built our brand to a point where it's actually cool now to be a part of A Jewellers, to be repping A Jewellers, to be buying from us. It's a beautiful thing to go from just being a dealer, basically a wholesaler or a dealer and understanding the retail business, to then building a retail business and building a brand. To now being a well known established brand, it was a big turning point.

**How long has it been since you launched A Jewellers?** I've been in this business, buying and selling for 15 years now. I was 18 years old when I bought the first watch and I was buying and selling sweets and cans of soft drinks in school from 10 or 11 years old. I've always been buying and selling from a very young age and I built a business buying and selling sportswear, trainers. So a little secret I haven't told anyone else, when I was about 14 or 15 years old, at that time counterfeit trainers were fashionable and quite normal to wear. People would wear fake Nike trainers, 10/10 copies and they'd buy them in different colours and stuff. We're talking 20 years ago, but back then it was normal, everyone used to do it. Now it's very frowned on and badly looked upon which I understand, I'd never do it now but back then it was a fashion. It was actually a good business, I used to buy and sell counterfeit Nike trainers, I used to sell them as counterfeit. Not tricking people, I sold them as counterfeit. But anyway, I drive around morning till night. I'd drive around with one left or right shoe for each colour just as samples, like 20 different styles and colours. I'd drive up to every single person that looked like they'd buy

the trainers, I'd go to every single barber shop, I'd go to every university, I went to every football astroturf. I'd go everywhere and I'd try to show these samples of trainers. I'd get people to take my phone number, I'd have trainers in the back of the car ready to sell as well. I'd have every size, every style and my boot would be full of trainers 'cause I was driving around selling trainers. Eventually from selling one or two trainers at college it became a business where people would call me morning till night wanting to buy trainers. I'd wake up with my phone ringing, I'd sell four for £100, one for £30. Then I started wholesaling, I'd get other people to sell trainers for me. I started consigning boxes and parcels of trainers, they'd sell them, resell on eBay and other places, they'd have market stalls etc. So that's when I really knew how to do business in buying and selling, I started making money. Then when I got to 18, having all these people and networks of people you're buying or selling to, you start kind of getting in touch with other things, you start buying parcels of different things. Then a watch was offered to me, I didn't know anything about watches. The first expensive watch I bought was £1000 but at the time it was a lot of money especially for a watch, you don't know why a watch would be £1000. I just knew that it was a good deal compared to the retail price and I just took a chance. I was always a calculated gambler and thank God I never really took any bad hits. Well I've taken some bad L's now over the years but I was too worried to take any bad hits when I was younger because it's a lot of money to lose £2,000, £3,000, £5,000. I'd always check everything out, make sure everything is correct, then I took my chance and I started buying things. This first watch was a Breitling, I bought it for £700 or £800 and I didn't know what to do with it. I spoke to some people and they said go to Hatton Garden, there's a lot of people there that buy watches so I went to Hatton Garden. I went in the shop and the first person would tell me "this is this and this is that, I'll buy it for £800" and then I said, "cool I'll be back" and I went into fifteen different shops. I understand people's psychology and approach, whether I thought they were trying to rip me off or not so I'd keep going and kept going. Over the years of me going in and out of their shops trying to sell things, some I wouldn't do any business with at all but I was just learning and understanding so when I get that now, I get it. Young kids are trying to sell things constantly, using our knowledge then going elsewhere. You've got to give it to them, how else are you gonna understand and know what to sell without selling something too cheap and cutting yourself short. So I'd go in and out of the shops, I'd try and sell it to every single person and I'd understand what price to go for. At the beginning you start very high and you know you're gonna look like an idiot and you're taking the piss out of people, so then you go lower to what you think is a bit more fair







but is maybe still slightly a bit too high. Then you slowly start understanding the price of something by going back and forth, eventually when it feels like it's the right price and you're ready to sell, then you sell. I'd put the word out to buy more watches, even if the margin was £300 or £400 pounds, I'd be happy to spend that day going to Hatton Gardens to sell the watch. Eventually I had loads of watches and bits of jewellery, I'd walk around with a bag in and out of all the shops and offices every day to go visit my dealers and people that I deal with. It became an everyday job, I'd walk around with a bag with watches and diamonds in there. I'd wear a shirt and shoes and get dressed up and look smart to go to work. I used to come to Hatton Gardens every day and learn and sell and buy.

**Was it an immediate attraction to the jewellery industry?** I've always been into buying and selling, I just found myself to have a natural gift for it from a young age. Bits and pieces of jewellery and watches got offered to me through the network of people that I had. I took a shot and bought one for what was a good deal I could make money on and it slowly became an everyday thing for me, just buying and selling. Then after some years learning and gaining experience and understanding the trade, I slowly started building a brand. I built a team, I built a brand, I put a system in place and I just kept building and pushing this brand. We started getting some recognition and attraction from people all over the UK, from all around. Our social media slowly started getting recognised by different celebrities; footballers and rappers. We slowly started being known for our special custom pieces and our new, fresh stuff that other people didn't have in the UK.

**You bought and sold a lot of things, what was different this time? Why were you so passionate about jewellery?** I was always into buying and selling different things, one of my main businesses was sportswear. So coming from selling a pair of trainers to make £15 pounds in volume and making small margins on things, I still kept the small margins but the value of the items I was selling was much higher. You'd make £345 or £600 minimum with each watch you sell and that's a quick sale to the trade most of the time. Then bits and pieces of jewellery like rings, bracelets, chains, the margins are much bigger. So from selling a pair of trainers to make £15, you're selling something and each item you're making £700 or £800. It just seemed like the right business to be in and on top of that I've always liked flashy things, I've always liked things that have a lot of work put into them. Things that you can bring out your own creative side by making and seeing an end product or just imagining something, then being able to manufacture it and be able to make it and have it as that ready made piece; this reality

from just an idea in your head.

**Was it hard to go from watches to pieces? How did you make that transition?** We started getting into customising watches with diamonds setting on watches so I started to understand diamond setting. I started getting

**“Before I got to any A Jewellers, I had to go through about eight years of hardcore raw dealing, trading with Jewish and Indian diamond dealers”**

more in tune with different qualities and styles of diamond setting, then from diamond setting watches, you're diamond setting chains and buying plain Cubans and diamond setting. When you're buying Cubans, you're then having to manufacture Cubans then having to start looking at CAD designs and casting gold, so then you start understanding the process of manufacturing jewellery. The next step was rather than manufacturing things that are generic and out there already, start to manufacture your own special custom things that you create and you design in your own mind. After making pieces by yourself and putting your work out there then people start seeing your work and start trusting your work and then you start getting people who want to use you to make their custom pieces. They have their creative process alongside you and you're knocking heads together and you're thinking of good things to come out with. It's something that you're working on together with the other person which after creating, sketching, drawing and manufacturing then you've got the end product. It becomes a very exciting thing and it becomes a very special thing to you because it's something that you've designed and you've made; it's like making a whole shoe from scratch, you've designed it, created it. It takes a lot of work to be able to get the right product and for it to be something that people want to wear today.

**It's a true craft, did you ever feel that you couldn't start this kind of company without that training? Or did you just learn through the process?** At the time I was looking into courses at GIA, different courses and then there was



Gem A, there's a few other diamond grading associations who you can do courses with. I even did a jewellery design course in uni, it was jewellery design and accessories or something. I was never the studying kind of guy, I mean I could have done it but it wasn't me. I was a rebel to be honest, I got into a lot of trouble in school and I just didn't want to study and do coursework. My parents pushed me to study. I got on this course and it wasn't really what I was looking for, it was a class full of girls and fun and banter. They were making jewellery from paper and other things, then eventually you started learning about making a wedding band. It just wasn't for me so I left it all behind and got into jewellery. With looking into going into a diamond course and learning about diamonds, it's something I was looking into. At the same time the people that I was doing business with - selling diamond parcels and selling gold to - are old experienced Indian diamond dealers, they've been in factories cutting diamonds and looking at diamonds from the age of 15 and they're 60 years old. So this GIA course can't even show me 10% of what these people know and physically dealing with the product in front of you, actually learning the business side to it, the dealing side to it, the numbers, the sizes, the market, the actual diamond market and dealing in the diamond market and understanding the psychology of business and doing a deal and trading etc. This stuff is priceless and you can't learn it on a diamond grading course, the only thing you really can learn on a diamond grading course is how to look at a diamond and how to tell what colour the stone is and the clarity and the cut and the shape and the facets, the girdle. But you can learn all this just from sitting and selling a diamond to a diamond dealer because he's going to sit there and he's gonna want to say things to put the stone down and say the facet is too big or the table is too big. Over years of selling, if you've got your wits about you, you understand what's going on and that this person is obviously trying to buy something for a cheap price. Even when I didn't know what was going on, I wouldn't just sell something for cheap if I can tell someone's trying to pull the wool over my eyes or trying to put down a product. Maybe he wasn't, maybe he was but I'm not going to sell it then, now I'm going to go to someone else. I'm going to test the waters, I'm going to go to seven or eight different diamond dealers. I'm going to see what they have to say and with everything I'm going to build my own analogy of what this stone is and how it works and then how much I think that I should sell it for. I'd always make sure that I got the best price for something. When someone comes along in a business where they don't even understand the product, being able to push the price up to someone who's selling a product who knows about the product is a skill in itself. I had that skill and then alongside that, once you're buying and selling so much, you start understanding



the product. Then when you take it to another level and you start buying stones and then selling them for certificates yourself, the same thing that these diamond dealers were doing when I'm selling to them. When you're buying gold and selling it to gold refineries instead of just selling it as scrap gold then you start taking it to the next level, you want to melt the gold yourself, you want to assay the gold yourself. You want to know exactly what percentage of silver's there, so you sell the silver and you get a price separate for the silver, you get a price separate for the gold. You know exactly what percentage that gold is because if you're going to go to someone with scrap gold and it's not British hallmarked or assayed, they're not going to want to buy it as 22 carat, they're gonna tell you it's 20 carat and they'll buy it as 20 carat. But if you melt and assay yourself, you'll know if it is actually 22 carat, you get the right percentage and you get it on a printout on a certified stamped seal that you can go and present it to someone. This dealer can't tell you this isn't that because it's all on paper and they have to pay the price. Same with diamonds, when you send something to GIA and you go to a diamond dealer and it has a certificate, they can't say "oh no this isn't the D colour this is the F colour, no no this is a SI1, it's not a VS2" because it's on a GIA certificate and no one can argue with GIA certificate. They're the ones who control the market, it's the most famous, strictest diamond grading association so nothing can go past that if the GIA paper says it's a D-IF, it's a D-IF.



**Did you feel that there was a gap in the market for your style of jewellery?**

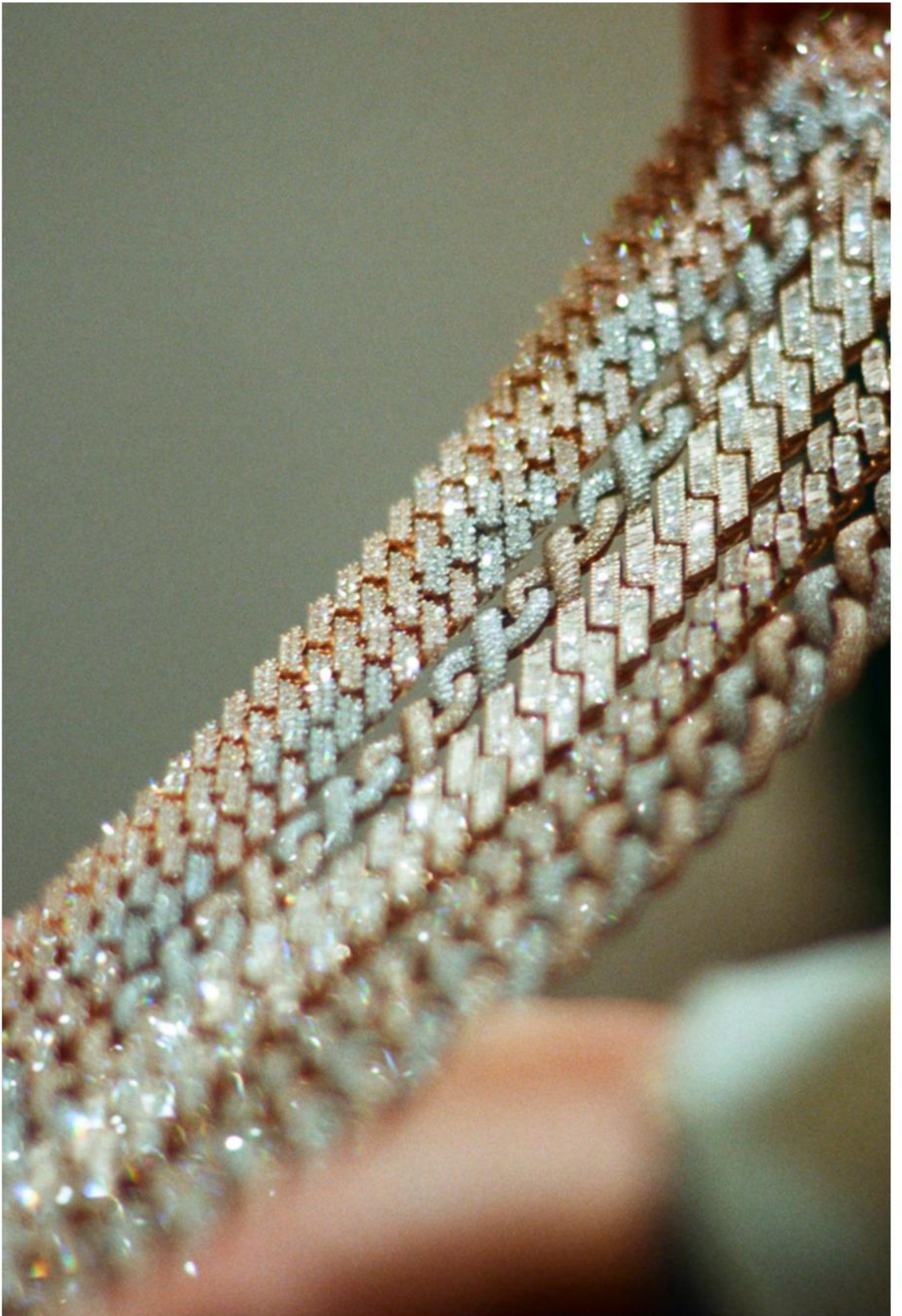
Before I got to any A Jewellers - retail customers, glitz and glamour, celebrity - I had to go through about eight years of hardcore raw dealing, trading with Jewish diamond dealers, Indian diamond dealers, buying parcels, buying rough diamonds, getting into the cutting manufacturing. There was a lot of raw stuff that I got into dealing with diamonds and gold and scrap gold, it was a lot to get into. With jewellery, if you're going to sell it into the trade when you're buying jewellery then you're gonna have to scrap the gold, you have to take out the diamonds, they're going to have to be assorted, they're gonna have to be acid cleaned, etc. They have to be sorted in different parcels, sizes, millimetres, then you go and sell them to different dealers. It's a lot of background work that a lot of other jewellers today didn't do, they just got into the business from finding someone who wants to buy a watch, finding someone that wants to buy a chain, making the chain for them. So I did all of the trading and the background for years and years. A friend of mine, his family's got a mine in Zambia and they mine emeralds and he was trying to get involved in his family business so he had a lot of big parcels like 25,000 carats 50,000 carats of different qualities and sizes and shapes of emerald, stuff that's extremely hard to move. I went to every single person that deals in emeralds in the UK, I traveled all around to sell these parcels. Eventually selling, brokering the deal and selling 50,000 carats of emerald, same with diamonds and other things. Before I got into dealing with end users and building a brand, I knew I was an expert in diamonds, I was an expert in gold, I was an expert in gemstones. I knew everything about everything before I even got to retail which gave me a lot more experience and knowledge and a big head start compared to what other people knew and what other jewellers were doing and were trying to get into at the time.

**Did you feel that that was essential to do before you even thought about starting our own brand?**

It wasn't necessarily essential but doing all of the raw trading and understanding everything helped. I'd buy every single watch you could think of, it wasn't just a brand new Hulk that's stickered up that is very easy to understand. Someone that's good at knowing how to buy and sell as a dealer, you can deal in anything. If someone offers you 40 slabs of marble, saying this is the code, this is the colour and you offer it to another dealer then it's quite easy. But when you're buying different brands and vintage stuff that has certain types of dials, certain types of hands - if it has this colour of hands, it makes this much difference, if the back of the dial says this number, it makes this much difference - it's very complex stuff that people don't understand. If it has this bracelet

but with this dial then it makes it this and if the papers have this code on it and this colour then it makes it that. There's a lot of complex stuff that vintage watch dealers understand and that's how they make their money. So in order to be able to get the right price for things and sell things and understand, before I do anything I do a lot of research on the product because the difference between you understanding and not understanding could mean £4000 or £5000 difference on a watch. Especially when it comes to vintage watches, just a dial on a watch can make £20,000 difference and the dial is something that you won't even understand or know unless you went to a vintage watch dealer. With diamonds, there's understanding that if something has a certain type of spread and the table's a certain percentage in ratio to the girdle and the culet, it's very complex and hard stuff to understand. I'd always do a lot of research into my product before selling it so that also gave me a cut above the rest. At the time no one was dealing in watches or diamonds or jewellery at my age, there was one other person that got into buying and selling watches and they got straight into diamond setting watches because they had a big company of diamond setting mobile phones before. He's also doing really well now, they're big in watches nowadays. But he was the only person back then, he was a bit older than me but a similar age. He got into the business in a different way than I did, there's also a few young people with dads who are big old watch dealers and jewellery dealers; they got into the business through being in their dad's shop. So there was that kind of stuff but it's not like Hatton Gardens now where the jewellery business has many new young people and everything, it wasn't like that before. Back then it was very, very difficult to get into and no one wanted to help you, no one wanted to give you advice or help you understand things. All the jewellers that I used to go sell watches and stuff to, I used to beg them to let me work for them for free, just for experience so I can learn the business. I was happy to make their tea and coffee and eventually just start understanding things. But people don't want to bring you in, people don't want you to learn and understand, it's a very secret business. It's a very old secret business, once you know the secrets, the loopholes and the things that people don't understand, with that knowledge is how you make your money. Although now I can get a phone call, find a particular watch, sell it and I can make maybe £50,000 on it. To do that in 20 minutes, which I can do now, is something that took 20 years to learn and understand. It's not something that you can just jump into and do well overnight. It's something that takes a lot of your energy and years and years of work and understanding to be able to trade in a certain type of manner and have a certain type of name and reputation to be able to do such things.











**Do you think that's why like when you did launch your own brand like a lot more people maybe wanted to work with a younger person because the older guys didn't get their style?**

They wanted to work with me because they liked me because I was just a young hustler and I was just grinding and doing my thing. But also because the other jewellers they were buying stuff from, it's a bit old and dated and a bit boring. I had a very fresh, innovative vision and understanding of styles and trends, what's hot, what people actually like and wear and who is that person who's cool to look up to in a fashion sense and iconic sense? What does he wear? How does he like it? Understanding different things that other people can't get their grasp on and understand. It's just having an understanding of more fresh stuff that was in at the time. A lot of other jewellers were dealing more cheap generic stuff that's iced out but it's just garbage really. At the beginning I was dealing with the same kind of garbage as everyone else but after a bit of time of trading and dealing and understanding, that's when I separated myself and I started making stuff and dealing with people around the world, ordering things that were different, that were new, that were fresh. It was a breath of fresh air to the jewellery business in the UK and no one had the kind of stuff that I was manufacturing at the time so that's how I got a lot of the traction. I think people like you because you're young and you're trying and you're different to other people but at the same time it's business and they want the best product and they want the best prices. So I don't think my age had anything to do with it, it was just me being different and outsourcing the right stuff to be able to start proving my name and showcasing my things.

**Is there a minimum spend when you're commissioned to make a piece?**

At the end of the day it's not all about money, I enjoy what I do, it's my passion plus I'm a people person and I feel for people's situations and I like to help people. A lot of the time I'll buy something off someone that I don't even wanna buy, I can't even be bothered to do it but I'm doing it to help their situation cause I feel like the person's a nice person. I might be on the shop floor when they walk in and my sales and buying team will say it's not for us and I say "hold on" and I might try to buy it for them even though there's nothing really in it, I'll do it for the sake of it. But realistically speaking, I have to manage my time and prioritise my time. I have to prioritise what's gonna be the best thing for me to spend my time on and the majority of the time, it would be something that would help me in status, in terms of my name and my brand, or it would be in terms of how much money it would make me. I have to put what's best first.

**What's your end goal for A Jewellers?**

Understanding and manifesting that anything is possible and there's no limit, the end goal for us is to push this company as far as possible, to make it as big as possible, to be as well known and established as possible, to be a worldwide brand, to be a household name, to be all over the TV, all over newspapers and magazines, to be all over online everywhere you look, billboards, TV, adverts and just to build it into a massive online business so we have different stores, dealing with the biggest clients in the world. Just to be the biggest jewellery name in the world, that's the goal.



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## Ayra Starr

*Words by Lily Mercer*

*Photos by Eddie Cheaba*





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**At just 19 years old, Ayra Starr is already a superstar. With her debut album, '19 and Dangerous', she's breaking records and captivating everyone from Nigeria to the rest of the world. She tells VIPER about writing her first song at 10 years old, what makes her dangerous and how excited she is to try Nando's when she visits the UK...**

**First of all congratulations on 10 weeks in the top five with '19 and Dangerous'!** I know, right?! This thing is so crazy, I'm so grateful that you can't even imagine.

**How have you been celebrating?** I've not even had time to celebrate because I've been working and I've been everywhere, but I'll probably go to some Korean restaurant and have fun with my friends.

**You've been breaking some big records, what else have you achieved?** I'm the first human to have two tracks at number one in Nigeria in the same year.

**How do you feel achieving these things at such a young age?** It feels amazing, I'm very young. People my age from where I come from are not even allowed to dream that big. So being able to break that stereotype and give younger people more things to dream about, it's the most amazing thing. I feel so grateful that God has given me this opportunity.

**Has it made you dream bigger?** Definitely! I'm the most annoying person, I'm like "you know when I perform at the Grammys" and they're like "oh god Ayra not again!" I'm just future bragging, every single thing I do I'm like "when I win a Grammy, when I have a private jet, when I perform at the Super Bowl." I'm just dreaming bigger, I always say it out loud because I believe in manifestation and affirmations. I always like to say it out loud so it definitely happens, I dream bigger every time.

**Those dreams sound quite realistic to be honest...** Yeah it does now but before it wasn't something an African girl or an African female musician would randomly say and wish for. We had to start from somewhere but now Afrobeats is taking over so it's very easy to dream about that now.

**Have you noticed more of a following from the American audience since your project?** I have from my album, when I released the EP it was just an introduction to the African fans and Nigerian fans and probably the UK also. But with the album a lot of people from the USA [showed love], I've not even had that type of love before. I don't even know how because this is a country I've never been to and people are saying they can't wait for me to come, it's just amazing.

**Have you managed to hit the UK yet?** Not yet,

but I'm going to be very soon so that's exciting too!

**A lot of people in the UK are already huge fans of yours, especially artists.** They are, I didn't even know this but I've been getting the sweetest DMs from artists and people in the UK and it warms my heart, it just makes me the happiest person. I really can't wait to go.

**Do you have anything in the UK that you want to do, for example Nando's?** [Screams] Exactly! That's what I've been saying all week! I can't wait to try Nando's because everybody that goes to the UK says Nando's is the best thing they've ever had so that's the number one thing on my checklist definitely. I want to get a tattoo in the UK too, a specific place that my friend told me about. I just want to be there and I want to go to a Zara store in person, not just shopping online. I want to spend all my money in Zara.

**If I was to come to Nigeria what would you show me to give me a taste of your country?** Okay so if you come to Nigeria, there are two states I really like; there's Abuja and Lagos. If you're in Abuja I would take you to the amusement park first then we will go to the Escape Room, then we would have dinner at this Amazonian restaurant where the waiters are dressed in gorilla costumes and you have waterfalls and plants everywhere. I'm a sucker for plants, I just want to see plants everywhere so that's one of my favourite restaurants in Abuja. Then if you are in Lagos, because of the traffic we're not able to do as much so I'll take you to the beach. We're gonna go to the beach, have fun and just vibe and I'll take you to my favourite Korean restaurant.

**What was the best part of making the album, '19 and Dangerous'?** The best part of making the album was that I wasn't really trying to make an album, if that makes sense? It was just something that happened, I was going to the studio to pour my heart out. The studio is like my safe zone, that's where I feel most at peace. That's where I want to go and declutter my mind and be at peace. So that's what it was for me, because after my EP it was a new experience, after my EP that's when I knew about fame and all that, it was a new experience entirely. So I would go to the studio and sing that out, every experience. Anything I experienced I would go to the studio and sing it out. It wasn't even supposed to be an album, I knew my album was going to be '19 and Dangerous', I knew that two







years ago. So it just made sense when I listened to my songs and I was like damn I've made '19 and Dangerous', this is it! This is the album I've been waiting for for two years. So yeah that's the best part.



**Now it's been released, what's your favourite song to perform live?** I don't have favourites because I love all my babies but I performed 'Bridgerton' for the first time yesterday and it was too mad. It was too lit, it was crazy. So that

**"I want them to feel inspired to be different, you're allowed to be different. You're allowed to be young, you're allowed to be a woman, you're allowed to be a girl, you shouldn't feel like you have to be treated less for being female."**

one has made me very excited and I can't wait to perform it again! So I might say 'Bridgerton' for now.

**Why did you include "dangerous" in the name? Because I'm sure you are dangerous but you also look kinda cute, what about you is dangerous?** [Laughs] I was going to

an interview one time and they were like "well you don't look that dangerous! You're 5'5". So being "dangerous" is not really about having a gun or anything like that. The day I realised that I'm not scared of making mistakes, that's when I knew I was dangerous because I'm not scared of failing. That makes me dangerous because I have nothing to lose exactly. I'm ready to learn, I'm ready to work as hard as I can to get to where I want to be. That makes me dangerous, that's the most dangerous thing ever.

**There are many women in the Afrobeats scene but you're one of the only ones speaking to the younger women and the teenagers. Have you found a lot of people reaching out and connecting with you for that reason?**

Definitely, it's just the sweetest thing ever. I was in another state in Nigeria a week ago and I met a girl at the club and she was crying and she was saying that she loves me, she loves my music and my music has changed her life. She was really young and it made me so emotional, because that's what I've always wanted. I've always wanted my music to impact people in a way that just makes them feel better because that's what music was for me growing up. I didn't have a teenage African musician to look at or a teenage black girl to look at and I wanted that too much for people. I wanted my younger sister to feel like she had someone speaking her mind for her. I wanted my younger sister's classmates to feel like they had a voice. That's what I did with the album which has been the best thing, getting messages from teenagers. [Laughs] I say teenagers like I'm not one but younger teenagers, younger girls just telling me they love me and they love my music and my music is for them. My music is their music.

**Are you excited to see the future wave of people that maybe are children now, who are inspired by your music?** What! I cannot wait for that, I am so excited. I saw a girl, she did a song on Instagram and tagged me, she was like "an Ayra Starr inspired track." And it sounded like something I would do and I was going nuts, it just made me so excited. I cannot wait, I want people to feel inspired by me. I want them to feel inspired to be different, you're allowed to be different. You're allowed to be young, you're allowed to be a woman, you're allowed to be a girl, you shouldn't feel like you have to be treated less for being female. I want you to feel confident every time and that's what I wanted my music to do and it's doing that, I'm excited about that.

**When did you know this was the career for you?** I've always known, I was that annoying child who would brag to people like "you know when I become a star, you won't be my friend." I would do that every time, I've always known. I was always the performer in my family, I always had to perform something in front of







everybody. I would call everybody to sit down, I had something to perform for them. I was in the choir, I always knew.

**You started songwriting at a young age, so when did you write your first song?** I started remixing songs when I was seven or eight, I would remix Michael Jackson songs and I'd put my own words. I'd take it to school and act like this is my song and people would be like "you're a liar, it's not yours." I would put my own words every time. That's how I started, I would remix songs. Then me and my brother started writing songs when I was 10 and he was nine. I started writing songs and then when I was 12, my mum got us a guitar and we started properly writing music. A song from my album, I wrote when I was 14 and my brother was 13.

**He co-wrote four songs on the EP with you, when you work together what does he bring out of you that's different to you writing alone?** He brings balance. I have ADHD and I have the brain of a fish, I get very distracted very easily. My brother is there to help me balance everything. If I have some things that I need to say and I don't know how to say, my brother knows how to bring that out of me. Sometimes I'm just giving melodies and he's bringing the words, he just knows what to say and sometimes he's bringing melodies and I'm bringing the words. He's my partner in crime, he brings balance when I'm not even with him and in the studio, my ADHD spirals and I'm jumping up and down everywhere so he brings balance definitely.

**Who are your dream collabs?** Rihanna. Of course, Rihanna! Kendrick Lamar, SZA, Burna Boy, Wizkid, Adele, oh my god! Jorja Smith, Stormzy.

**A very strong list! I was hoping you'd say Jorja Smith, this is hopefully on the cards?** Amen. Jorja Smith, I love her music, she has a song called 'Don't Watch Me Cry'. That song legit made my life easier for a whole year, I was listening to that song every day. When my dad passed away I found the song a day after and I felt like he was the one singing that to me. So that song was my anthem for a whole year. I love Jorja so much. Oh my God, that would be so amazing.

**Tell me a bit about your entry into the industry and how you got started as an artist.** I used to upload covers on Instagram, then the first time I started to do an original song written by my brother. I uploaded it on Instagram, this is something I was overthinking for a whole day before I posted and it wasn't even up for three hours before Don Jazzy sent me a message! He was like "we need to meet up at the studio, just call me" and the rest was history. We met at the studio with my brother, we talked and we recorded some songs. The songs we recorded that day were on my EP, two songs on my EP.

That was my first time ever in the studio, my first time near a mic. I didn't know anything about studios, I just knew how to write songs and sing. It was actually so natural.

**What's the perfect setup when you record?** Candles are definitely one of my things but also I don't know if it's the Gemini in me but I don't like routine. So if I'm using a candle today, I don't want to use it the next time I don't know why. But candles are one of my favourite things, I love my gummies in my session every time. So my gummies, water, candles, that's all.

**How does your mood affect your recording?** If I'm angry I need to be in the studio because before I felt like I could only write music when I was sad or when I was angry. That's the energy I

**"I was overthinking for a whole day before I posted and it wasn't even up for three hours before Don Jazzy sent me a message! He was like "we need to meet up at the studio, just call me" and the rest was history."**

used to be in but now I can write music anytime. I write music on the plane, if I'm in the studio. I can record whenever I want to record, I just have to discipline myself and get in that zone and do whatever I can to get in the zone. But also if the vibe is not vibing then I'll just take myself out of the situation and leave.

**Do you ever take a break from writing after a project? Or do you just write constantly like whenever you get an idea?** Yeah whenever I get an idea I just write. Music for me is not a job, the work is travelling and press and all that. Music for me is the reward so when I'm making music I feel better. I don't really have to take a break from it.

**Before music you were a fashion model as a**



**teenager, do you think fashion will ever come back into your career not as a model but maybe a designer?** Definitely, I'm a fashion killer so yes I would love that. I love fashion so much and I love to express myself through fashion. So yes, definitely.

**So far what's been your favourite outfit to perform in?** I do this thing where I wear the biggest baggy pants I can find and I wear a trench jacket or coat then I wear a bralette

**"I'm a fashion killer so yes I would love [to design]. I love fashion so much and I love to express myself through fashion."**

under. That's my go to performance outfit, it's so dramatic but I love it. There are other artists that just come in a T-shirt and pants, then you see me in all white and people are like 'Ayra, oh my god! You're so dramatic!' Yes. I love to be like this.













*Words by Lily Mercer*  
*Photos by Mike Miller*











Since rising through the ranks of SoundCloud, \$NOT has placed himself at the forefront of melodic modern Rap. With viral hits like 'Gosha' and 'Revenge' already under his belt, the Florida rapper is preparing for the release of his latest album, 'Ethereal'. He started making music in 2016 while still in high school, at a time when many rappers from his state were achieving global fame. Rarely seen without a hoodie tied tightly around his face - sometimes with a bandana thrown on top - \$NOT's fanbase keeps doubling. He talks to VIPER about \$NOT Type Beats, making timeless music and being inspired by the dark sounds of Memphis in the nineties.

**How did you get the name \$NOT, before Rap was it a pre-existing nickname?** It's a thing in my friends group, they gave me the name "SNOT." Plus in Florida when I was in high school, kids would always call other kids boogers or whatever, it was just an insult. I kind of took it, you know, to the next level and made it my name.

**To those that know you best, what's the best thing about you?** The best thing about me artist wise or me as a person? As an artist, I gotta hoodie on and shit, that's different. Well, I mean, I'm still the same person as an artist. So I like to be different, but I don't have to try, it's just me being me. And me being me means I'm already different. So that's the best thing about me.

**So what is the first thing that people ask you?** Why do you wear a hoodie? Or how long have you been doing music? Or can you drop a specific song? It'll be one of those three, or "let's smoke, bro. You want to smoke?" If they were to see me in person, those types of questions.

**Do you have a hoodie wardrobe?** I got a lot of hoodies in my closet, it's crazy, I got a lot. But don't get me wrong, I got shirts and stuff too. I don't walk around with the hoodie tight on my head like on Instagram or Twitter and Social Media. I wear a hoodie normally.

**Do you still get recognised when you haven't got the hoodie tied like that?** Yeah, sometimes. Recently it depends on what I post. If I post a picture of me wearing a mask with my hoodie on, some people can notice that in person, it's cool. Some people don't walk up to me, they'll take photos of me from a distance and I'll see it. They'll try to pretend like they didn't do anything. It's crazy but it's cool.

**At least you got some very dedicated fans if they can spot you like that.** Yeah, I'll be telling them to come up to me. They say I look mean all the time, but I don't know, I'm a nice dude.

**What for you is a \$NOT Type Beat?** It needs to catch my ear. A couple of years ago, there wasn't a \$NOT Type Beat but the producers, they're making them now and they're two or three years late. I've been looking for my type of sound and it took probably two or three years for producers to figure it out. But now it's too late, now I'm just making whatever catches my ears, like a tight beat. If it blows up then people might think that's my type of beat, but it's really not. I get on anything, I get on maybe something dark, smooth, chill, sad. I'm an artist so I can get on anything.

**"Later on I was like, fuck it. I'm not a dark person, I like to have fun, fuck it I'll make a fun track."**

**That's a good trait to have. So what do you make music for?** Um, I got a lot of bills to pay. [Laughs] I'm playing, I just like making music, it's whatever you want to take from it. I make a sad song and talk about something very relatable that hits the kids in a different way where they can relate to it. If I'm chill, it's just some fun shit, but I just make music. There's not a bigger meaning for real. Motivation, it's just some fun, you know? I just like doing it.

**How did you develop your vocal style? And did you always sound like this?** I started back then it was more of a dark type of vibe. At first when I started out, I didn't like my voice. Because I was like, "Damn, I really sound like this?" So I had to find confidence within my voice to appreciate it. You need your voice to make a song so I was like, "damn, I gotta get past this." But it would





always have a dark vibe, because I listened to a whole bunch of underground artists and a whole bunch of people from Memphis, they make a lot of dark music. So when I get on the mic it'd be dark but then later on in the years I was like, fuck it. I'm not a dark person, I like to have fun, fuck it I'll make a fun track. Then all that switched up so now we're here.

## **"I had to find confidence within my voice to appreciate it."**

**I get a nostalgic vibe from your music, is that intentional?** It's very intentional I'm not gonna lie, I listen to a lot of old music that just makes me nostalgic, especially Coldplay. I don't even know why; you play that one song 'Viva La Vida'. When I'm in the studio I just think of that song but it doesn't have to sound like 'Viva la Vida' at all. I just tried to make something that's very nostalgic in style. It doesn't even have to be a big song and people don't have to like it, it could be like a specific cliché. A specific audience that likes this type of sound, I'll make it for them specifically. My whole fan base doesn't really have to like this one but maybe these 10,000 followers will like this type of sound. It's just

nostalgic stuff for me.

**How did it feel to do shows again after lockdown?** It was cool to get back to doing the shows because it's been a year and so when I started performing it was just like, "Yo, this is fun." It takes all the stress out of my mind and I just have fun instead of staying home in a room quarantining and shit. Like that shit's so lame.

**Now you're outside and it's 'Beautiful Havoc's first birthday. So you've got a first birthday coming up for your project, do you celebrate the anniversaries of project releases?** Yeah, I'll celebrate. My last project, we celebrated with a whole bunch of people at an Airbnb with drinks and we smoked while listening to the album. We waited for this little timer on the TV, counting down to when the album drops. It's kind of cool, it's like a listening party kinda.

**So tell me about the new project.** It's an album with me doing different sounds because I don't like to make the same shit that I blew up off, it just doesn't make sense for an album. You want fresh new sounds, especially if the sounds are not new to you. I didn't want to revisit my old music and try to make it all over again. Because that's boring, you want to try some new shit. All of them don't have to be hits, the album's specifically for the fans.

**Is 'Red' one of the singles from the project?** Nah, that's nowhere near the album for real. There might be one single, hopefully the feature comes through. But that might be the single, the











feature I'm waiting for. It's really crazy, it's a big surprise. I don't know if it's a surprise to you, but it's actually crazy to me. Because the person hasn't made music in a minute, everyone knows him.

**There's one person in my head. Who is it?**

**Frank Ocean.** [Laughs] No I want Frank Ocean on my album too but he's doing jewellery, I bought one of his pieces. That's all he does, you can't even buy the jewellery online you gotta go to the store, which is crazy.

**Tell me about the piece you bought.** If you go on his page or the Homer website, he has this flagship jewellery where it looks like a flower but it looks like a fidget spinner and has a diamond in the middle. It's pretty cool, all the stuff on there is really, really expensive so I'm guessing it's very luxurious.

**Obviously you and Frank will make great music! Amongst the current climate of superstars who would you say you'd most like to work with?** I like Travis \$cott, I like A\$AP Rocky I like Tame Impala. I like artists that push the boundaries. Musically Tyler, the Creator, he's really good.

**That's a very strong list, a song with all of you guys would be mind-blowing.** That would blow the whole world up, no cap. I could retire after that if that would happen.

**You've got very wide ranging inspirations but who were the parents of your sound?** I used to listen to Lil Wayne, he was the main dude, he was just everywhere as a kid! You couldn't run away from him, he's all over the TV and he makes good music, so that's the plus. Everybody wanted to be like Lil Wayne, that's why you see most rappers have "Lil" in front of their name. They just fuck with Lil Wayne, he's the main dude that started everything.

**He's the most influential working today, him and Juicy J.** I got a Juicy J feature on the album, that's really crazy. Yeah Juicy J I used to listen to a lot.

**That's what I thought you were referencing when you said the dark sounds of Memphis, Three 6 Mafia territory?** Yeah Three 6, I've listened to old cuts not even from Three 6 but you know Shawty Pimp? There's a whole bunch, even Yo Gotti, his old music; he doesn't sound like how he used to when he was a kid. When he was a kid he would rap very fast but now it's like it's different now it's more mainstream.

**I feel like a lot of Florida rap, especially more recent Florida rappers, are inspired by the Three 6 sound, why do you think it's so influential?** Well Florida, it's either hood music like real hood rap, Kodak to Iceberg Slim but then there's the Memphis, heavy distorted 808s. The kids like that type of sound, it's kinda different when you hear the Memphis distorted beats. It started with Xxxtentacion and the whole Raider Klan, there's a whole underground movement. Florida was good at capturing that type of sound and trying to renovate it.

**You've worked with members of Raider Klan, but what influence did the collective have?** I wasn't around the group at first, I got into it a little bit later but they've been around for a long time. They're like the OG's of SoundCloud, they're up there with A\$AP Mob. Raider Klan was just a moment, like A\$AP Mob, Odd Future with Tyler, Glo Gang with Chief Keef. There were a lot of things going on around that time and a whole bunch of groups coming up.

**"I feel like SoundCloud is better than ever. People say it's dying but I feel like the more it dies, the better it is"**

**That Raider Klan project, 'BLVCKLVND RVDIX 66.6' was a classic.** That was a classic, at the time I never heard of all that. An artist that really influenced me, he has nothing to do with Raider Klan at all, was Yung Lean. His music was just different and it showed me other artists that were in that type of realm. That's how I see Raider Klan and I was like, "Damn this is all different." A\$AP Mob was a little more mainstream, you could walk in a Footlocker shoe store at the time and there's TVs in the ceiling playing A\$AP.

**You're very much a product of the SoundCloud era, do you feel that the experience helped you navigate your career?** Yeah, it all started with Lil Yachty when he had the Sprite commercial and he was on his SoundCloud thing. I was like, "Damn" because at the time, being a SoundCloud rapper was really looked down upon. Now it's just like the new likeTikTok or whatever but at the time SoundCloud rappers were not seen as real artists, then you see Yachty with millions of dollars and shit, who's winning at the end of the day? It doesn't even matter, good music is meant to be found and SoundCloud was the best place to find the good music, plus it was



different from the mainstream. Not a lot of kids know how to put their music on Spotify so they made sure to put it on SoundCloud because it's easier, you could upload and call it a day.

**Now you have to look harder to find those artists.** I feel like SoundCloud is better than ever. People say it's dying but I feel like the more it dies, the better it is, there's more underground. It's just the underground is meant to be seen, when you die you're underground like that's the best place. To find the music, it's like a jam you know, under a rock. There's so many iconic artists including myself that have been considered SoundCloud rappers so it's clearly not a bad thing.

**Were you into My Mixtapes or DatPiff?** Personally I like My Mixtapes because in middle school they would block all the websites but for some reason like they didn't block My Mixtapes, this is at the time Future was going crazy. Gucci Mane was in jail, Chief Keef was going crazy so My Mixtapes they'd update the thing every day or every week. They were all Chief Keef drops, all Chief Keef would drop is mixtapes then Future would drop a lot of mixtapes and Gucci had Holiday Season, it was just crazy shit.

**"I don't like to make the same shit that I blew up off, it just doesn't make sense for an album - you want fresh new sounds"**

**The Florida scene had street Rap existing alongside the more experimental melodic scene with a good example being 'Roll In Peace' by Kodak Black and Xxxtentacion. Why did the two blend so well?** It's just a Florida thing. If there's two artists going crazy, it's only right for them to work. It was just a Florida thing at the end of the day and then people were like, if you're from the same area with somebody and both you guys are mainstream, people want to see. They're two of the biggest artists in Florida so it was like, fuck it's time to work with each other. So they made a hit.

**Having global attention on your state at that point, did you feel like you could make it too?** Yeah, at the time I was in high school so there's not really that much of a big pressure because I was just having fun. I'm still having fun, it's just a little more serious. At the time I was just having fun, I didn't really take music too seriously, it



was just a rush. Drop a song and then you see the numbers go up.

**You said that when you started, people at school were not into your music, have those people become fans now?** Yeah, I welcome them with open arms. It's always like that anyways, but it's not even about the music they just probably see "oh, this kid was in my high school and look at him now! My fucking little sister, my brother's listening to him." It's just some shit like that, now they can't do anything but respect it, for real.

**What are your plans for 2022?** Um, well, I got a movie.

**Oh, wow.** With Denzel Washington. [Laughs] I'm playing, I don't.

**You got me!** [Laughs] Yeah, I just go with the flow. I don't really know what's going on. Who knows, I could get a movie with Denzel Washington. Life's kind of weird, you never know. I could be talking to you, the next day I could be in the new series of the Squid Game, I don't know! That shit is crazy, Squid Game's crazy. I watched it three times, but I still never finished it. I'll watch it at night and fall asleep.

**Do you have plans to get out of the US anytime soon and see the UK?** I'm gonna get there soon, go to Europe and explore more of the world. There's a lot of fans from all over the place, so I











have to do it. Especially London, Australia.

**Is London being thirsty in your comments? Because you have a lot of fans in London.**

Yeah, I do, I got a lot of fans in London! Oh, yeah, I can't wait to go. I can't wait to see the food, I have a friend that doesn't like the food there. So I mean, hopefully it's good. Is there a place called Nando's? I've never been there. But, I just hear it all the time. So I'm pretty sure it might be good.

**How did you incorporate your laugh ad-lib into your music?** When I laugh, it's crazy because it's a forced laugh. I'm not really laughing so it's kind of cringe. Damn, I'm fake laughing on everything for real, but I guess it just adds character. It adds charisma, I'll say a bar and if I find it funny, I don't have to laugh, but it was a little joke so I laugh at it. It could be a bar about me crashing into someone or doing a drive by and I just laugh like it's just something funny.

**It's a little sprinkling of humour on dark parts of songs as well.**

Yeah, it's me too, you're not gonna take everything too seriously, so you could laugh at it even on a sad song.

**"I want to make a big figurine, like a ten foot figurine and put it in my house."**

**With ad libs, did you ever try and force one? Or do you ever come up with really stupid things and think 'I can't do that'?** Yeah definitely, there's ad-libs out here from these artists and I'm like, "Damn, how did he come up with this?! How did you come up with this ad-lib?" I'll try it in the studio, I'm like yeah, I can't, I'm not gonna take this dude's ad-lib. It was those types of situations, or an ad-lib where I'm yelling like, "ugh, this is not me." I'll have that type of moment and just try some other basic shit, or laugh or some shit.

**Tell me about your clothing line.** I got this clothing brand called Get Busy Or Die but the last six letters of Get Busy Or Die is YORDIE so I had to shorten it. It's just me trying to get into streetwear fashion so it's different from the music industry. It's kind of doing good because

all my fans were into it so it was cool, I'm trying to do different designs and shit. Be tuned in, there's a lot of cool shit in the coming months.

**What's one of your favourite pieces from the collection so far?** I made an incense capsule, it's a soldier with his head down. I got the bone sticking out and then there's a little tube in the back like it's his gun but it's opened up with smoke coming up from the back. It's made out of wood, like handcrafted so it's cool.

**Are you developing into designs like cut and sew?** Yeah, I've been doing cut and sew too, I did a little hat with patches and stuff. With this capsule, at the moment I want to make a big figurine, like a ten foot figurine and put it in my house or something.

**Where is it stocked?** Everything's online, I'm gonna do pop-up shops. If I go to London, I might do a pop-up shop; it's mostly online though.

**What kind of drops do you do, seasonal or more regular?** Monthly, like a regular type of thing. You know, whenever I feel like it, honestly.





Ardee







\$NOT





Ayra Starr